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**Factors Superintendents Consider When Making the Decision Between
Commercially Developed Curriculum or
Locally Developed Curriculum**

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Locally Developed Curriculum**

by

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Treatise

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2011

Dedication

This is dedicated to my wonderful mother, Gloria. I cannot possibly string together enough words to express all my love and appreciation for her. She truly is amazing and made this experience possible for me.

Mom, you have always been my biggest fan. Through this project you have been an unimaginable support system, but that is nothing new. We can now look back on all those days I spent at the house working and writing, you making sure I had everything I needed, and encouraging me to work hard during the day so we could relax in the evening. You treated me like a queen and made my workload a bit easier to tackle. It has all paid off.

I am an educator because of you. I know everyone has their opinions, but without a doubt you are the best teacher ever, and there are countless people who will agree with me. You inspire me to not just do all that I can for kids; but even more so, you inspire me to be a better person. You have instilled in me a work ethic that I am personally proud of and strive to uphold every day.

Thank you for all your time, energy, love, encouragement, care, and motivation as I complete this voyage. You are my cheerleader, my foremost mentor, my pillar, my best friend. I love you with all my heart and more!

Acknowledgements

It would be silly to think I accomplished this on my own...hardly! There were many moving parts, all working together that enabled me to complete this weighty task. In a very small way that does not do them justice, through a handful of words; I want to acknowledge a few people in addition to my mom who were a part of this with me.

Kenny, you have this cool way of supporting me that always gives me that extra boost just when I need it. Your one liners... 'you got this' or 'get it girl' ...would give me that push to finish a certain task. Thanks for putting up with me through all this and for making sure I had my breaks to recharge. Being your sister is the best, and you have helped with this goal more than you probably even know.

Kimberly, your confidence in me has always motivated me. There are so many reasons why you are an awesome sister, but I think my favorite is how I laugh more with you than anyone! Trust me, all the laughing refueled me to tackle the next course, semester, paper, or chapter. Jack, I have learned from you and look up to you. You have been a gift to our family, and I am fortunate you are my brother-in-law. Thank you for supporting me through this program. Cameron, I will never forget how excited you were for me when I first started teaching...you were in elementary school and you were so proud of me. As you get closer to your first degree, know that I am a proud aunt and will always support you just as you have supported me.

Bobby, the Cooperative Superintendency Program at The University of Texas was something I would check out online, read about, and think how amazing it would be to be a part of it, and then you helped me make it happen. For starters, thank you for

nominating me and then guiding me along the way. I have learned so much from you; thank you for providing me with so many opportunities to glean from your experiences. People have told me I have the best mentor; I agree. You are a dear friend, and your encouragement and assistance while reaching this goal were priceless.

Jill, I am not sure exactly where to begin...perhaps March 3, 2010. I was so uncertain about my treatise topic. I wanted to press on, and yet I was simply confused as I had all these ideas zooming through my head. When we met on that March 3rd, I left that meeting a new, rejuvenated, focused person ready to take on my treatise. I have appreciated your guidance, intelligence, experience, and motivation during this process. Every time I would talk to you, I would be revved up and inspired to reach my goal. You have been a gem to me.

Matt, hands down you were the best ‘deadline driver.’ When I asked you to assist with keeping me on track with my deadlines, you took it on; and you were a huge help and motivator for me! You kept me on task with just the right amount of balance. You commended me when I deserved it and held me to the deadline when I needed it. Thanks for being a sounding board, for your insight, your wit, and for the all the positive words through this trek. Go Horns!

Andrew, thank you so much for giving me the incredible opportunity to work at Manor ISD. I have learned so much from you and cannot thank you enough for your confidence in me and for allowing me the flexibility to be a part of this program.

Dr. Olivarez, your direction and leadership helped me immensely to reach my goal. Thank you for accepting me into the program and for being my committee supervisor. Your wise feedback and guidance were invaluable.

I want to say how much I appreciate Dr. Edwin Sharpe, Dr. Xiaofen Keating, Dr. Bobby Ott, and Dr. Jill Siler for serving on my committee. You all are very committed to education and have extremely busy schedules as a result. Thank you for your time, assistance, and knowledge.

Being part of a cohort was a special experience. My cohort gave me so much... support, advice, laughs, and above all friendships. Xochitle, you and I connected from the start, and days at UT with you will always be some of my best. Thanks Drew for being an awesome project partner. Pete, thank you for being so accommodating and helpful in so many ways. Dora, Stephanie, Rawly, Angie, Lisa, Lori, Kim, Maritza, Ron, Marlon, and Nakia, thank you for making Cohort 19 the fabulous group of folks that it is.

To the six superintendents who were willing to be the fulcrum of my research, thank you! I appreciated you carving out time from your pressing schedules to talk with me and share with me your thoughts and wisdom regarding curriculum and education.

There are definitely others who have assisted me in varying ways. Thanks to Dr. Kelly Crook, Casey McCreary, Hortensia Palomares, the wonderful people I work with at Manor ISD, and the launch I received from Copperas Cove ISD.

Much appreciation to all of you who helped me reach this accomplishment!

**Factors Superintendents Consider When Making the Decision
Between Commercially Developed Curriculum or
Locally Developed Curriculum**

Lana Kay Veazey, Ed.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Ruben Olivarez

This study examined the factors superintendents consider when making the decision between commercially developed curriculum or locally developed curriculum. This study was guided by three research questions: (a) What factors does the superintendent consider in selecting a curriculum? (b) How do these factors impact the decision to use a commercially developed curriculum or to use a locally developed curriculum? and (c) How does the decision-making process regarding curriculum selection correlate with other functions of the superintendent and the school district?

This qualitative multiple-case study intended to describe the experiences of six school superintendents who have served in this capacity for ample time to have developed a perspective in relation to curriculum choice for their respective districts. During semi-structured interviews, questions posed to the participants were organized around the following themes: (a) importance of curriculum along with time devoted to overseeing curriculum and how this relates to other responsibilities of the superintendent; (b) the factors considered when deciding curriculum choice; (c) the pros and cons of

commercially developed curriculum and locally developed curriculum; and (d) the challenges associated with curriculum. This questioning along with the review of documents relating to curriculum guided the development of the findings and provided structure for the reporting of data and analysis. The data collected through the interviews and document reviews were coded according to first-level coding and pattern coding.

This research study revealed that overseeing and maintaining a guaranteed and viable curriculum is very time and cost intensive, but the essential piece for student achievement. In addition, in regards to deciding between commercially developed or locally developed curriculum, the superintendents in this study were adamant advocates for their curriculum choice and had justifiable reasons for their choice. The final finding disclosed in this study was that with the role of the superintendent being very taxing, the function of Curriculum and Instruction does not always take priority.

In conclusion, with such emphasis placed on having a guaranteed and viable curriculum, as the chief instructional leader, superintendents must put forth a concentrated effort to select a curriculum that will promote and support student learning and success.

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Chapter 1: Introduction of Study

A decade into the 21st century, our country's educational leaders continue to be faced with the complex challenges of a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse student population. This challenge is magnified by an increased public expectation of providing a high quality education that reflects innovation, engagement, and rigorous and relevant educational experiences that produce learners with 21st century skills. During the last 45 years, there have been major national and state legislative educational reform mandates pressed upon local boards of trustees creating a highly charged, political, and intense educational environment. These mandates have been coupled with high stakes accountability standards accompanied with exacting compliance, thus calling for an extensive range of competencies within school leadership.

As the American population has grown, so has the size and magnitude of public schools. The forces of political, social, and economic change have significantly increased the extent of responsibility of the American public school district superintendent. Not only are public school leaders expected to effectively and efficiently manage the complex functions of the contemporary American public school district, they must also carry this responsibility in a consuming environment of strained economic conditions and declining resources (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006). Central to the superintendent's leadership is the improvement of instructional delivery services to students and ensuring adherence to new and continually changing state-mandated school curriculum. Some critics have argued that district leaders are inherently incapable of stimulating and sustaining meaningful reforms in teaching and learning because of their

bureaucratic character (Corcoran, Fuhrman, & Belcher, 2001). Educational leadership preparation programs are restructuring university curriculum to respond to these changes. Varying thoughts on the current and future leadership and managerial abilities of educational leaders will continue. However, the harsh conclusion remains that the superintendent's responsibility of ensuring that every child receives instruction from a viable and improved educational curriculum will remain central to the mission of the public school system (Hersh, 2009).

Fifty years ago, during the infant stage of the modern Space era, the launch of Sputnik ignited fierce national debate about the inadequacy of the American public school education system. The advent of American scientific and technological accomplishments as a result of the new Space era and growing nature of world competition in the nuclear arms race fueled a national push for a new educational curriculum that would transform the expected level of cognitive and technical performance skills of the American student. The modern curriculum was to reflect an expansion of more advances and complex mathematics and science content and called for inquiry-based pedagogy that would teach students how to think and apply their learning, rather than to simply recite and recall (Glatthorn, Boschee, & Whitehead, 2009).

In 1983, two decades later, and with the continued growth of scientific and technological advancements with rapid population growth and diversity, the education debate was rekindled when Americans were warned in *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education) that a rising tide of mediocrity in the education system threatened the nation's security (Bell, 1993). The report stated that "if an

unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war” (Rothstein, 2004, p. 8). This strong language had an electrifying effect on American people and served as a tool to rally the nation around their schools and education (Bell, 1993). The states responded to *A Nation at Risk* with a flurry of legislative action reflecting mandated accountability student performance measures and various other changes in education policies at both the state and national level (Bell, 1993). A byproduct of this report was the unprecedented Presidential and gubernatorial attention to education (Knudsen & Morrissette, 1998).

The public’s concern for quality education has continued to fuel the national and state government educational reform agenda. The effects of No Child Left Behind legislation and the imperfections of its implementation during the last 10 years has intensified the complexity associated with the public school superintendent role. Specifically with the emergence of federally mandated high-stakes testing since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, along with the issue of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), school leaders are confronted with the all-encompassing task of implementing the many disparate elements of the law’s main provisions and consequently have placed mounting focus on school curriculum (Cohn, 2005).

The state of Texas has required curriculum standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), specifying what students are expected to know at each grade level according to two defined sections: (a) the foundation curriculum and (b) the enrichment curriculum. The Texas Education Code (TEC §21.451) outlines the

foundation curriculum consisting of English language arts, math, science, and social studies. The enrichment curriculum consists of other languages, health, physical education, fine arts, economics, career and technology education, and technology applications. The State Board of Education (SBOE) requires through statute (TEC §28.002) that districts provide instruction in the TEKS as a condition of accreditation as well as to prepare students for the mandatory assessment, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), which is aligned to the TEKS and is used to measure student performance of required standards. The state requires districts and campuses to develop both district and campus improvement plans addressing the areas of need in student performance each year (TEC §11.251) including a needs assessment primarily defined by student achievement results based on the state assessment program. Certain funds can be spent in accordance to these identified academic needs.

Texas' accountability system is established upon the assumption that districts adhere to all required curriculum mandates and includes student performance on the statewide assessment instrument in its accountability indicators. This system is designed to demonstrate how well districts are educating students and requires districts and campuses that have been identified as Academically Unacceptable for three or more consecutive years of low performance to address curriculum management and/or curriculum presentation. In addition to the state accountability system and according to the 2004 state plan to address the federal No Child Left Behind requirements, districts or campuses that do not achieve Adequate Yearly Progress are also required to address curriculum issues the third year of failure. These districts and campuses must implement

school improvement sanctions such as offering students the right to transfer within the district. According to NCLB, after three years of consecutive failure, districts must implement significant curricular activities in conjunction with other administrative and management activities. The Commissioner of Education has the authority to take action under TEC §39.131 and §39.132, sanctions for districts and sanctions for campuses respectively, and to impose sanctions on districts that do not meet the acceptable levels related to student performance (Texas Education Agency, 2008a).

With student performance at the fulcrum of funding, accountability ratings, and federal and state initiatives, providing a viable curriculum to meet the needs of all children is a vital responsibility of today's school districts (Andero, 2001). Though states such as Texas may provide curriculum standards, more is needed to address the fact that so much information is already accumulated and new knowledge is being produced; the vexing question remains: What content should we teach and how much is enough? (Levine, 2009). Determining the curriculum for a district is paramount for student success (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). With school districts being nested in a complex environment of expectations, regulations, and professional stimulation from external sources including state and federal agencies, independent reform projects, board of trustees, parents, and other citizens, prioritizing curricular needs must not fade into the background; thus, this becomes a critical function of the instructional leader of the district, the superintendent (Glickman, 2001; Reeves, 2007).

Performance accountability has accrued relevance and notoriety throughout the century (Popham, 2007) and as a result has changed the state of the superintendency, as

well as what school boards are looking for in a superintendent (American Association of School Administrators, 1993; Brown, Swenson, & Hertz, 2007; Glass, 2000). In order to not only compete but survive, a new system of education is required due to economic, social, cultural, demographic, political, and technological realities. The superintendent is expected to be the primary instructional leader in the school district and create and communicate a district-wide vision for student success at all levels of the organization (Black, 2007; Castle & Estes, 1995; Fullan, 2004; Johnson, 1997). More specifically, the superintendent oversees that a well-rounded education is not the result of a simple accumulation of courses and credit hours but rather the cumulative effect of clear, rigorous, and collective teacher and administrative commitment (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Furthermore, the superintendent must create a culture that refuses to define education as the passive reception of knowledge and instead recognizes demanding, profoundly engaging, and authentic educational experiences (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988).

Statement of Problem

The role of the public school superintendent has continually been challenging and varied (Kowalski, 2006; Owen, 1998). In recent years, accountability requirements and increased standardization associated specifically with the No Child Left Behind Act may have added to the complexity of the role (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003; Peterson & Young, 2004). Today's superintendents face one of the most challenging and exciting times in the educational history of this nation and setting priorities and formulating curriculum change continues to be an important role of any successful leader (Glatthorn, et al., 2009). Thus, superintendents must recognize that academic responsibilities must

remain at the forefront, and selecting a curriculum based on ever-changing state standards is critical not only to the success of the district but ultimately to the success of staff providing instruction and students receiving instruction.

The state of Texas in recognizing the requisite of sustaining standards that will disseminate high quality learning, has established cycles of refinement and alignment within the content curriculum standards (TEKS). Consequently, each year different content curriculum standards are being revised, added to, and deleted which then positions school districts to implement the revised standards and modify curriculum accordingly. In summary, all these changes necessitate that school districts rework, rewrite, realign, and execute revised curriculum, all of which requires a substantial amount of time, resources, personnel, and funding. Superintendents must then take into account several qualitative considerations in making curricular decisions. These considerations present a subsisting challenge for the modern superintendent.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the impinging factors and the irrespective variables that influence and guide the superintendent's decision-making process in selecting a curriculum. Considering the multitude of complex functions that define the operational nature of school systems, this study also investigated how the curriculum decision-making process impacts the other leadership and managerial functions of the modern superintendent such as campus operations and instructional support services.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What factors does the superintendent consider in selecting a curriculum?
2. How do these factors impact the decision to use a commercially developed curriculum or to use a locally developed curriculum?
3. How does the decision-making process regarding curriculum selection correlate with other functions of the superintendent and the school district?

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used in this study to investigate the factors a superintendent considers when selecting a curriculum. The unit of analysis was the superintendent of a Texas public school district; this corresponds with working with small samples of subjects within their context and studied comprehensively (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Multiple cases provide a deeper understanding of processes and outcomes of cases, as well as the chance to test hypotheses; therefore, a multiple case study approach was used for this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The purpose of sampling in a case study is to generalize the findings and not be confined to merely the subjects in the study (Yin, 2008). Through the study of individuals in specific settings, information can be gathered that can be applied in similar situations, focusing on the general case rather than the individual (Trochim, 2000). This type of research is interconnected, flexible, and reflective; it is a continuous process that involves ongoing assessment of the implications of every stage of the study (Hammersley, 2002; Maxwell, 2005).

Qualitative data were gathered by a single researcher. The principal data sources consisted of semi-structured interviews with superintendents from purposively selected districts, as well as document examination. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three coding phases: (a) open, (b) axial, and (c) selective were used for the analysis. In addition, the 10 functions of school districts/superintendents as outlined in the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guide* served as a coding framework for analyzing the factors superintendents consider in selecting a curriculum. Triangulation of results from all three data sources informed the findings and final conclusions (Mertens, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Definition of Terms

The following were operational definitions used in this research study:

Accountability: A primary emphasis on measured student performance as the basis for school accountability, sometimes accompanied by other indicators of success; the creation of relatively complex systems of standards by which data on student performance are compared by school and locality; and the creation of systems and rewards and penalties and intervention strategies to introduce incentives for improvement (Elmore, Abelman, & Fuhrman, 1996).

Accountability System in Texas: Assigns ratings to every campus and district in the Texas public education system each year. Currently the Accountability System, administers various rating labels ranging from lowest to highest: Academically Unacceptable, Academically Acceptable, Recognized, and Exemplary. To determine the rating label, the system evaluates indicators of performance, including assessment results

on the state standardized assessment instruments, as well as longitudinal completion rates and annual dropout rates (Texas Education Agency, 2008a).

Commercially Developed Curriculum: Externally (outside of the district) developed packages in which curriculum content is already developed and embedded in a management system; purchased by the district (Legislative Budget Board, 2009).

Cooperative Superintendency Program: A program within the Department of Education Administration at The University of Texas at Austin designed to prepare educational leaders for executive level positions: superintendents of school districts, chief executives in state education agencies, directors in education service centers or laboratories, and executive level management posts in large cities or suburban districts (Olivarez, 2008).

Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook: Developed by the Executive Director of the Cooperative Superintendency Program at The University of Texas, which combines administrative, instructional and political leadership theory with real world applications through the 10 functions related to the dynamic leadership role of the superintendent (Olivarez, 2008).

Curriculum: A trilogy of components: (a) subject matter content knowledge; (b) structure, sequence, or form of content knowledge; and (c) pedagogy including suggested lessons and instructional strategies (Au, 2007).

Curriculum Alignment: How well all elements in a system (content standards, performance standards, and assessments) work together to guide instruction and student learning (Webb, 2007).

Curriculum Management System: An online, computer-based system that links and aligns all teaching, learning, and assessment components. It provides a consistent, fully integrated platform that facilitates stakeholders at all levels in maintaining a continuous focus on improving student learning and mastery (Legislative Budget Board, 2009).

High-Stakes Testing: When test results are used to make important decisions that affect students, teachers, administrators, communities, schools and districts (Maduas, 1988). As part of the accountability movement, stakes are also deemed high because the results of tests, as well as the ranking and categorization of schools, teachers, and children that extend from those results are reported to the public (McNeil, 2000).

Large A ISD/Large B ISD: Pseudonym for the two largest districts interviewed in this research study.

Locally-Developed Curriculum: Internally (inside the district) developed curriculum content that is either stand-alone or embedded in a management system (Legislative Budget Board, 2009).

Midsized A ISD/Midsized B ISD: Pseudonym for the two midsized districts interviewed in this research study.

Small A ISD/Small B ISD: Pseudonym for the two smallest school districts interviewed in this research study.

Ten Functions of School Districts/The Dynamic Leadership Role of the Superintendent: As outlined in the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook*: (a) Governance Operations, (b) Curriculum and Instruction, (c)

Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations, (d) Facilities Planning and Plant Services, (e) External and Internal Communications, (f) Accountability, Information Management, and Technology Services, (g) Safety and Security Services, (h) Human Resources, (i) Instructional Support Services, and (j) Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS): Annual academic assessments at specified grade levels used to measure student achievement in the areas of reading (grades 3-9), language arts (grades 10 and 11), math (grades 3-11), writing (grades 4 and 7), science (grades 5, 8, 10, and 11), and social studies (grades 8, 10, and 11). TAKS is aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (Texas Education Agency, 2008a).

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): Curriculum framework adopted by the state of Texas that establishes core foundation learning expectations in each subject area divided by grade levels and/or courses (Texas Education Agency, 2008b).

Significance of Study

This study was significant in a number of ways as it contributed to the literature in the field of leadership in the modern superintendency as it related to the pressing issues facing education today in regard to the school function of curriculum and instruction. This study augmented existing knowledge in the area of superintendency leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Caine & Caine, 1997; Holdaway & Genge, 1995; Jazzar & Algozzine, 2006; Leithwood, Steinbach, & Raun, 1995; Tierney, 1988; Wheatley, 2006) and how addressing curriculum was a key responsibility for superintendents (Beane,

1991; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Peterson & Finn, 1985). There is extensive literature emphasizing the fact that a superintendent has many responsibilities as the instructional leader (Black, 2007; Collins, 2001; Hayes, 2001; LaRoque & Coleman, 1991; Murphy & Forsyth, 1999); however, minimal attention has been paid to the specifics of curriculum choice and how this choice impacts other functions within the district. This study was conducted to provide valuable information to acting and future superintendents as they take on the challenge of curriculum and instruction leadership, as well as information for future educational leadership research on the administrative role and complexities of the modern superintendent.

Limitations

When imposing a qualitative paradigm, a research study is faced with common limitations. Due to the subjectivity depending on researcher judgment for strength and significance of a finding, legitimacy of findings may be an issue (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using a multiple-case study of six superintendents included the following limitations: (a) the inability to generalize findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994), (b) the lack of comparison information from other districts, (c) the relatively small number of purposefully selected respondents, and (d) the potential for bias due to a single researcher gathering and interpreting data (McEwan & McEwan, 2003). The design of this study put forth a concerted effort to counterbalance the aforementioned limitations. The interviews with the six superintendents occurred during the season of budget planning. During this particular legislative session, the state had announced a significant deficit that

could have influenced the responses related to variables considered in the decision making process.

Delimitations

This study focused on six superintendents of school districts with varying sizes within the Central Texas area and their perceptions addressing curriculum choice. The intent of this study was to provide insight into the thought processes of superintendents as they consider district factors before selecting a curriculum. It was not the intent of this study to outline a regimented formula regarding a method of curriculum selection. Despite the fact that six districts were purposefully selected for this study, due to the nature of the limited study, the results cannot be generalized to other settings. The study was not focused on the public opinion of any individual or group of individuals but focused on the case study subjects through direct experience to provide a more curbed, yet more extensive, dimension to the data. As data were collected, the researcher operated under a set of assumptions as outlined in the following section of this study.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that through interviews and direct observations of the subjects that the selected respondents were disposed to speak freely and act naturally in the setting. In addition, the researcher assumed that the case study respondents had the ability to recall specific details of their leadership and thought processes in relation to curriculum choice. The researcher also assumed that the study was conducted as objectively as possible, and if at any time the researcher underwent bias that could interfere with the findings of the research, it was disclosed to the reader.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an overview of a study that examined the superintendent's role in selecting a curriculum. This study proposed researching six superintendents and the factors they considered when selecting a curriculum. Included in this introductory chapter to the study is the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the questions guiding the research, the methodology, the significance of the study, definition of terms, and specific limitations, delimitations, and assumptions of the study. Albeit the research is viewed through the eyes of a single researcher concerning a limited number of superintendents, the results of this study could yield a far-reaching contribution to the literature describing the leadership skill set of the modern superintendent.

The following chapter will address what the literature reveals regarding the necessity of superintendents taking the lead in curricular issues. Further, the following chapter will illustrate how pressing educational mandates are catapulting the need for superintendents to be veritable instructional leaders.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Aspiring to be a superintendent requires imperative preparation that meets the evolving challenges facing school organizations of the new millennium, while at the same time redefining educational leadership. The Cooperative Superintendency Program at The University of Texas at Austin, striving to maintain its position as one of the premier superintendent preparation programs in the country, is at the forefront of preparing executive level educational leaders to meet the ever-changing needs of today's public education system (Olivarez, 2008). In its effort to improve the existing level of superior leadership preparation, the Cooperative Superintendency Program faculty has provided the fellows of the program with the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook*, which emphasizes more than any other single factor, the ongoing pursuit of school improvement, now characterized by operational and management strategies and how this defines the current context of superintendent practice. The superintendent as the instructional leader of a school district must know what a viable curriculum is in order to facilitate the design and implementation of curricula that enhances teaching and learning. Simply stated, this literature review will examine two areas: (a) the rationale for curricular focus and (b) areas of curricular focus.

Rationale for Curricular Focus

Local school boards still tend to identify finances, facilities, operations, and personnel as the top-priority activities of their superintendents (Kowalski, 2006). Nevertheless, Kowalski (2006) further explains the press upon superintendents to be leaders of instruction in addition to overseers of operations is real and growing. A

superintendent is the most influential player in the business of providing a suitable curriculum to meet the needs of all students and produce a citizen who is successful and productive in life (Andero, 2001). Hence, the superintendent cannot afford to neglect the primary role as the instructional leader in relation to communicating the elements of the common curriculum and in providing the supervision to ensure its implementation (Andero, 2001).

Increased Academic Rigor

As districts continue to strive to meet the rising standards and accountability measures, more and more emphasis is placed on the importance of the curriculum a school district uses (Owings & Kaplan, 2003). While curriculum has always been critical to the success of public education, its importance was made more prominent with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. Owings and Kaplan (2003) state the primary assertion of the report was that United States students were not performing well in traditional academic areas and had demonstrated a notable decline in their performance; thus, for the first time, an attempt was made to specify the knowledge and skills that should be addressed in specific subject areas. Consequently, for school districts to progress forward interrelating to student achievement, school leaders are expected to provide the best possible curriculum to children: a curriculum that prepares each student for the future and maximizes the potential of each (Andero, 2001).

More recently, The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has induced a substantial amount of discussion and debate pertaining to its impact on education in the United States (Petersen & Young, 2004). Petersen and Young (2004) explain NCLB's

reliance on data from annual student achievement scores to determine the future of schools, students, and personnel brings about a complicated and ominous challenge to the daily professional life of the school superintendent. The superintendent can no longer reside on the sideline. The demand of proven results has moved the role of the superintendent to the frontline in supporting student achievement (Petersen & Young, 2004).

Cohn (2005) explains that although some superintendents view the NCLB Act as a helpful and supportive part of an overall school reform strategy building on local and state accountability initiatives, others see it as a punitive and draconian measure designed to build the case for vouchers and other private sector provider schemes by arguing that public schools have failed in many communities in America. Nevertheless, the implications from the law have presented school leaders with stringent requirements and corresponding consequences as a result because of not meeting those requirements (Bracy, 2003).

As a result, many states have examined and revamped their educational systems to reflect needed reform measures in regards to accountability, testing, and curriculum (Glatthorn et al., 2009). It can be concluded that because systems of educational accountability are now more than ever being built on high-stakes, standardized tests are in fact intended to increase external control over what happens in schools and in classrooms, namely through the vehicle of curriculum (Au, 2007).

Accountability for Academic Performance

A student's ability to be successful on achievement tests stems from what is being taught in the classroom, specifically the curriculum; therefore, the curriculum warrants commensurable attention by the superintendent. In the model of high-performing schools, curriculum is primarily focused on attaining the goals and objectives explicit and implicit in the program of testing and assessment (Downey, 2003). Downey (2003) expounds that district leaders who fail to grasp the clear implication of becoming a high-performance school usually do not understand that everything does not have the same priority. Some things are much more important than others and the final arbiter of the matter of importance is the curriculum (Downey, 2003). Furthermore, Downey (2003) states this is not a politically naïve decision on the part of instructional leaders; rather, if schools do not demonstrate their capacity to attain even a modest range of general mainstream purposes, low-performing schools are dealt with "harshly and punitively, perhaps even put out of business" (p. 150). Thus, with such consequences, there is the continuous talk surrounding the insistent need for school reform and the leading role superintendents play regarding this reform.

Beane (1991) addresses the peculiar imbalance in contemporary school reform and states that no matter how radical restructuring talk may otherwise be, it almost never touches upon curriculum itself. There is little logic in claiming to speak of school reform without addressing the centerpiece of schools, the curriculum (Beane, 1991). In fact, Peterson and Finn (1985) state that it is rare to encounter a high-achieving school system with a low performance superintendent in the area of curriculum involvement.

Murphy and Hallinger (1988) present findings from an exploratory study of 12 instructionally effective school districts (IESDs) in California. Districts were identified on the basis of their ability to promote high levels of student achievement on standardized tests. The authors of this study had several objectives, one being defining the role of the superintendent in promoting an IESD (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Murphy and Hallinger (1988) detailed several technical characteristics of the IESD as they related to the role of the superintendent and stated superintendents in these districts played an active role in providing direct leadership in the areas of curriculum and instruction. Eleven of the 12 superintendents had an important part in inspecting the district curriculum and the implementation of the curriculum, as well as instructional strategies (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). The goal of the study conducted by Murphy and Hallinger (1988) was to describe some variables and factors that characterize a sample of instructional effective school districts in California, and as a result their research revealed that one factor was related to attention to curriculum and instruction on behalf of the superintendent.

Organizational Operations

In addition to the important implications from accountability, superintendents should focus on curriculum because it serves as a foundational piece in the overall operation of the organization. Druker (2008) stated: “Each social sector institution exists to make a distinctive difference in the lives of individuals and in society. Making this difference is the mission—the organization’s purpose and very reason for being” (p. 13).

The superintendent leads the way in establishing this mission; therefore, it is necessary for the superintendent to discern what critical component must be included. Downey (2003) states the mission of the district is defined by the curriculum, and the curriculum is essential to meet the aim of the mission. The mission of a school system is to prepare students to function as effective citizens, to live personally satisfying lives, and to contribute to and improve society, and the curriculum is an important part in accomplishing this mission (Downey, 2003).

Downey (2003) states school systems are so complex that not all functions can be monitored; however, the more important functions must be monitored to ensure the organization is on track in accomplishing its mission. Druker (2008) adds the core mission remains fixed while operating practices, cultural norms, strategies, tactics, processes, structures, and methods continually change in response to changing realities. Subsequently, with curriculum serving as the underpinnings of the mission, the curriculum remains solidified; and as the district's instructional leader, the superintendent has the responsibility to see that it does so.

An additional layer to the mission and the direct connection the superintendent has in establishing such, lies in the values of the organization. This, too, has an explicit link to the curriculum. "The values of an organization usually pertain to treatment of customers, treatment of organization members, core competencies and standards of excellence" (Yukl, 2006, p. 314). Further, Bolman and Deal (2008) state values characterize what an organization stands for, qualities worthy of esteem or commitment. Hence, with emphasis placed on values and the relation they have to the organization, in

regards to school districts, Owings and Kaplan (2003) assert that the curriculum reflects an organization's values; it is the school and community's big picture. Appropriately then, the superintendent would need to focus on the curriculum to establish and preserve the values of the district.

Today's superintendent must have a comprehensive leadership skill set. As leaders they must champion others, verbalize beliefs that the organization can be the best, that potential in the organization is evident and can be turned into strengths (Rath & Conchie, 2008). This is achieved by setting high expectations. Downey (2003) affirms that because schools and school districts are systemic in nature, "leadership for articulation of high expectations must start at the top" (p. 152). Again, this has a pointed correlation with the need for superintendents to focus on curriculum. Reeves (2002) examines some of the nation's most effective educational leaders, in systems large and small, that demonstrate that strategic leadership is the daily integration of priorities with action. Reeves (2002) refers to Bill Habermehl, superintendent of the Orange County California Office of Education. This superintendent has the responsibility for almost half a million students and "his priority is paying attention to curriculum" (Reeves, 2002, p. 129). Habermehl explains his organization is not permitted to choose the path of least resistance because it might indicate that the members in the organization are validating inappropriately low expectations (Reeves, 2002). As a result, to establish high expectations within the district, the curriculum must be deeply aligned in regards to content, context, and cognitive level (Downey, 2003). The superintendent must then

endorse a curriculum that will foster high expectations, which in turn, will likely contribute to academic success (Schmoker, 2001).

The 10 functions of a school district/superintendent as outlined in The University of Texas *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook* all warrant the indispensable attention of the superintendent. With curriculum and instruction being one of the 10 functions, the aforementioned research and literature delineated the fundamental reasons why a superintendent needs to focus on curriculum. Now that the rationale for curriculum focus has substantially been established through the literature, what areas of the curriculum does a superintendent need to know and execute focus?

Areas of Curricular Focus

The Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook (Olivarez, 2008) provides aspirant superintendents, not only a detailed explanation of each of the 10 functions and how they are interrelated, but also provides a series of questions to consider as the superintendent delves into each function. Therefore, the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008) serves as a comprehensive outline interdependent to what superintendents should focus relevant to curriculum. An examination of a subset of those questions subsequent to the Curriculum and Instruction function through corresponding literature are examined in this article. Questions such as: What is curriculum? How does the district assure that the curriculum is aligned to state standards? Does the curriculum prepare students for state accountability assessments? Is there a scope and sequence in place for all curriculum content areas and grade levels? Is there a curriculum management system in place? Will

the curriculum be purchased or locally developed? Is the curriculum accessible to teachers?

Curriculum Standards and Alignment

Initially, being cognizant of what curriculum actually is, is a necessary step. There is a myriad of definitions in the literature regarding curriculum and as a result, keeping a clear focus on its essence is difficult (Van den Aker, 2003). Van den Aker (2003) explains in this case it often helps to search for the etymological origin of the concept:

The Latin word “curriculum” refers to a course or track to be followed. In the context of education, where learning is the central activity, the most obvious interpretation of the word curriculum is then to view it as a course or plan for learning. (Van den Aker, 2003, p. 2)

Kelly (2009) defines curriculum as all the learning that is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school. Thus, school leaders must specify in advance what they are seeking to achieve and how they are to go about it (Smith, 2000). In connection with the previously referenced literature referenced that punctuated the requisite of meeting the accountability standards due to NCLB, Smith’s (2000) statement of leaders knowing in advance what they want to achieve in relation to learning underscores how vital it is to have a curriculum that is focused on and aligned to issues of testing and evaluation (Wraga, 1999).

Looking at Texas for example, their efforts in statewide curriculum standards provided the basis for the 2001 federal NCLB Act aimed at decreasing achievement gaps in increasing overall student performance (Legislative Budget Board, 2007). Texas was the first state to significantly detail a mandated core curriculum that required a foundation

and enrichment curriculum to be taught as outlined by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Consequently, the current state assessment instrument, Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), assesses the TEKS in part (Texas Education Agency, 2008b). Therefore, the necessity to have a curriculum aligned to the state standards is tantamount to student success on state accountability assessments (Glatthorn, 1994), an exacting issue superintendents are faced with continuously (Petersen & Young, 2004).

Essentially, alignment refers to how well all elements in a system work together to guide instruction and student learning, all coordinated toward a single goal: educating students to reach high academic standards (Hansche, 1998; La Marca, Redfield, & Winters, 2000; Long & Benson, 1998; Webb, 2007). La Marca et al. (2000) explain alignment of content standards, performance standards, and assessments is crucial to an overall effective curriculum. Thus, a superintendent must ensure and endorse a district curriculum that is aligned to the external assessment objectives, as well as provide clearly specific content to be learned, the context in which the learning must be demonstrated, the appropriate cognitive level to be mastered, and the standards of performance required (Downey, 2003; English & Steffy, 2001; Glatthorn, 1999; Wraga, 1999).

Overseeing curriculum alignment as it relates to standards-based reform will require the superintendent to understand that this alignment is a form of educational quality control (Wraga, 1999). English (2000) identifies two methods for establishing a fit between the curriculum and the test: “frontloading” and “backloading.” Frontloading means the educator writes curriculum first and then searches for an appropriate test to

measure or assess whether or not students have learned what the curriculum includes, and backloading refers to the practice of establishing the match between the curriculum and the test by working from the test back to the curriculum (English, 2000). Backloading the curriculum, that is aligning the local curriculum to the content of standardized tests, is the modus operandi of curriculum alignment (Wraga, 1999). By concentrating on working backward from the test and curricular content, “the district would ensure that important tested content is actually covered in the curriculum” (Squires, 2005, p. 67). Furthermore, if a district has schools with low-performing scores on state tests, Downey (2003) explains it is absolutely imperative that the district’s curriculum deeply backload from the external test. Synthesizing the concept of curriculum alignment, the superintendent must accede that curriculum alignment recognizes the exercise of teaching to the test as a legitimate educational practice and in effect offers policymakers and educators an agreeable rationalization for teaching to the test in the name of equity and accountability (Wraga, 1999).

Downey (2003) states, “it is important that students have the opportunity to learn well that which is tested” (p. 23). She continues to explain that “learn well” means that a student has mastered the learning or can go beyond mere recall with the learned facts, figures, or concepts and apply them to a variety of contexts and at challenging cognitive levels (Downey, 2003). This transitions into an additional area a superintendent, as the instructional leader, must focus and identify in regards to curriculum, specifically the scope and sequence. Sequencing the learning objectives so they are mastered well in advance of being tested and including the standard of performance within an objective is

a strategic and substantial element in curriculum (Downey, 2003; Jacobs, 2004). The scope circumscribes placing objectives in the curriculum earlier so students have adequate time to demonstrate if mastery has been reached (Glatthorn et al., 2009) contrary to placing objectives into the curriculum the same year it is tested externally (Downey, 2003).

Curriculum Management

As the literature identifies crucial pieces and measures connected to curriculum, it is evident that superintendents must provide the leadership in managing and fully integrating all the components of a sound curriculum. Curriculum management consists of several discrete and unique factors that must be constructed and implemented successfully, and they must be crafted and woven together in a system that is functional, practical, and sound (Legislative Budget Board, 2009). Amidst a Texas School Performance Review, the Legislative Budget Board (2007) emphasizes the need for curriculum management by recommending the Legislature should require through statute that all districts adopt a curriculum management board policy that addresses the curriculum review, revision, alignment efforts, written curriculum guides, and related professional development according to a schedule in annual District Improvement Plans. The Legislative Budget Board (2007) reported that board-approval curriculum management policy and efforts are fragmented statewide and most do not specifically address a schedule for developing written curriculum guides or reviewing instructional materials.

Appropriately, the superintendent would examine this exigency of curriculum management and consider implementing a curriculum management system. With varying definitions of a curriculum management system, the Legislative Budget Board (2009) defines it as an online, computer-based system that links and aligns all teaching, learning, and assessment components. The Legislative Budget Board states: “It (curriculum management system) provides comprehensive, consistent, fully integrated platform that facilitates stakeholders at all levels in maintaining a continuous focus on improving student learning and mastery” (Legislative Budget Board, 2009, p. 532). The Legislative Budget Board (2009) elaborates by explaining that while the specific components of these systems may vary based on individual district needs, the modules of a curriculum management system often include a data warehouse, curriculum, instructional resources, assessment exams, and in-depth customizable reporting.

In considering the implementation of a curriculum management system, the superintendent as the instructional leader would primarily need to determine if the district curriculum will be locally or internally developed versus commercially or externally developed. School districts have chosen to buy externally developed curriculum packages in which curriculum content is already developed and embedded in a management system (Legislative Budget Board, 2009). On the other hand, districts have decided to engage in comprehensive local curriculum development. Regardless of the choice, a superintendent must lead this decision-making process based on factors present within the district and with the overarching concept that curriculum development is an ongoing problem-solving process and involves the systematic evaluation and reevaluation

of the purposes, practices, and impacts of the local education program (Wraga, 1999). Further, curriculum development must be approached as a process of diagnosing and resolving educational problems with the aim of optimizing learning for all children and would draw from a variety of sources of information about student learning (English, 2000), employing preassessments (English & Steffy, 2001), and formative and summative evaluations (Jacobs, 2004).

A simple step that superintendents cannot overlook is that once a comprehensive curriculum is in place, it is pivotal to ensure that all the users of the curriculum have access to it (Downey, 2003, p. 38). Principals, teachers, and other site-based administrators should have access to the scope and sequences of objectives for every subject and every grade, as well as matrixes of aligned resources and assessments (Glatthorn et al., 2009). Downey (2003, p. 38) states that as curriculum is placed online, access becomes easier. Superintendents should also make certain that the instructional sequences of learning objectives are made available for students and parents on the district Web pages.

Chapter Summary

Cuban (1984) affirms that school improvement cannot be achieved without a high level of curriculum and instruction involvement on the part of the superintendent. Furthermore, improving education requires district level leadership and superintendents who serve as instructional leaders contributing to the instructional effectiveness of their school districts (Björk, 2009). In order for prospective superintendents to be prepared to perform exceptionally as school executives during a time when the superintendency is in

a state of constant fluctuation (Olivarez, 2008), the Cooperative Superintendency Program has addressed the challenge by outlining and elaborating on the 10 functions of a superintendent in a non-discursive approach by means of the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008). With such evidence presented in the literature, it is evident as to why curriculum and instruction is delineated as one of the 10 functions (Olivarez, 2008).

The literature also supports the requisite as to why a superintendent should focus on the curriculum. Jones and Howley (2009) state that a major concern is the stringent accountability associated with superintendents and the emphasis for educational leadership rather than managerial functions. The role of the superintendent is both challenging and varied, and in recent years, accountability requirements and increased standardization as imposed by federal and state standards, have added to the complexity of the role (Farkas et al., 2003). Studies indicate that superintendents in instructionally effective school districts have increased effectiveness as instructional leaders by directly influencing the improvement of curriculum (Björk, 2009). Thus, an effective superintendent as the instructional leader of the school district will see the pivotal need to focus on curriculum.

Likewise, knowing what to focus on in regards to curriculum is proportionately a critical factor. As instructional leaders, superintendents must have a substantial foundation in what curriculum is and how it relates to the development of successful citizens and their achievement. Currently in many states, with such emphasis placed on high student performance on state assessments, superintendents must understand how

curriculum integrates with assessment standards as well as the curriculum's potential to successfully prepare students for state assessments. This requires a design that encompasses alignment in addition to a viable scope and sequence. With such high-priority and expansive needs connected to curriculum, the superintendent may need to investigate and implement a curriculum management system, one that is internally or externally developed.

Findings of Bridges (1982) and Cuban (1984) indicate that the success or failure of public schools has been directly linked to the influence of the district superintendent, particularly those who maintain a high level of involvement in curriculum and instruction. Therefore, superintendents as instructional leaders must continuously put forth a concentrated focus on curriculum in order to meet the needs of today's students amidst the competitive pressures and demands their profession encounters.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The review of the literature presented in Chapter 2 addressed the context for this study of what factors the superintendent considers when selecting the critical component of a successful school organization: the curriculum. In order to facilitate this study and to make theoretical assumptions even more explicit (Miles & Huberman, 1994), the following research questions were formulated and addressed:

1. What factors do superintendents consider in selecting a curriculum?
2. How do these factors impact the decision to use a commercially-developed curriculum or to use a locally-developed curriculum?
3. How does the decision-making process regarding curriculum selection correlate with other functions of the superintendent and the school district?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology and procedures and protocols the study pursued including research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design: Qualitative Research

Given the nature of the stated research questions, a qualitative methodology acted as the underlying research design. This commonly used form of research, which is often used in educational studies, seeks “to discover and understand the phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). Willis (2007) states qualitative research has a tendency to look at the subject matter holistically and within the larger context in which it resides. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) describe qualitative research as producing both exploratory and highly descriptive

knowledge while deemphasizing the solely causal models and explanations that have historically dominated the research process. Therefore, qualitative methodology lent itself to the study including specific characteristics that contributed to findings as they related to the research questions.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Qualitative methodology is more than a set of data-gathering techniques, but a way of approaching the empirical world (Anfara & Mertz, 2006; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Qualitative research:

- Takes place in the natural setting, through direct contact with a life situation (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994).
- Strives to interpret the ways subjects in specific settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tesch, 1990; Wolcott, 1992).
- Involves procedures that rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry (Creswell, 2003).
- Remains significantly closer to codified commonsense than the complexities of statistical analysis of quantitative data (Robson, 2002).
- Provides a quality of undeniability through the straightforwardness of the collection, therefore, leading to increased credibility of reports (Robson, 2002; Smith, 1975).

- Utilizes an analytical and interpretive framework that helps the researcher make sense of what is going on in the social setting being studied (Mills, 1993).
- Allows for data collection of real-life activities using interactive methods and descriptive interpretation (Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2008).
- Employs the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998).
- Contains procedures including interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to generate data (Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 2001).

Characteristics of Qualitative Researchers

With the researcher being the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998), the researcher is identified with a unique set of traits. Characteristics of a qualitative researcher include:

- Gathers data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories (Merriam, 1998).
- Strives to increase validity of findings and confidence in conclusions by linking meaning, interpretations, and theory-connected operations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
- Maintains an open and inquiring mind, is a good listener, has general sensitivity, and is responsive to contradictory evidence (Robson, 2002).
- Exhibits sensitivity to his/her own biases and how they shape the study (Creswell, 2003).

- Acknowledges that personal-self is inseparable from researcher-self representing honesty and openness to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2008).

Data Collection in Qualitative Research

With regard to the data collection process in qualitative research, there subsists unique characteristics. With qualitative data, one can follow the chronological flow of events and by using words rather than numbers can develop a story that provides more in-depth meaning and experience to the reader (Mills & Bettis, 2006). Creswell (2003) defines qualitative data collection steps as “setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured (or semi-structured) observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information” (p. 18). The qualitative researcher purposefully selects participants and sites, including the setting where the research will occur, the participants who will be researched through observation and interviews, the events in which the participants will be involved, and the process or sequence of events that occur within the setting (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), qualitative data comprise a number of items, all of which are open-ended and collected in a natural setting. Encompassed within the data collected are “detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, and case histories (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p.

159). The data collection techniques used and the participants selected will influence the meaning and understanding developed by the research; thus, multiple sources of data are often used (Willis, 2007).

Merriam and Simpson (2000) further explain the objectives of the data are to ascertain what people's lives, interactions, and experiences mean to them in their own terms. Instead of waiting until all the data are collected, Merriam (1998) explains the importance of initial analysis occurring simultaneously with data collection and how this is only possible if the researcher is an instrument of research. In this study, the researcher brought insight to the research due to her involvement in education and specifically curriculum development for the past seven years as a coordinator and director. The researcher guarded against innate bias that has evolved over time, and as an observer, interviewer, and document recorder, the researcher had access to the case, albeit in the capacity of an outside entity. Practicing as the instrument of research in this study, the researcher encountered advantages and limitations intrinsic in the qualitative methodology.

Qualitative Approach Advantages

Cooke and Rousseau (1988) state qualitative analysis comprises a number of advantages, particularly in organizational cultural research. Qualitative data focus on “naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a handle on what real life is like” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Miles and Huberman (1994) continue to explain another feature of qualitative data is the richness and holism with strong potential for revealing complexity. Qualitative research is emergent, rather than tightly

prefigured, and the pattern of understanding will emerge as it merges into a more broad interpretation (Creswell, 2003). Creswell (2003) continues by stating the qualitative researcher uses complex reasoning that is multi-faceted, constant, and simultaneous as well as both inductive and deductive processes are at work to provide depth to the reasoning process. Additional advantages include (a) descriptions that allow the examined unit's own terms to describe itself; (b) the rich information that can be obtained from a unit; and (c) the usefulness of the method for research on issues about which little or no information currently exists (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2005). Although there are many advantages to qualitative research, there are limitations to this method of research that warrants consideration as well.

Qualitative Approach Limitations

The researcher's bias and constructs of reality have an impact and influence on the collected data as well as the method selected for the collection of information (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Robson (2002) states there is a tendency to ignore information that conflicts with hypotheses already held and to emphasize information that confirms the hypotheses. Considering bias is an understood consequence of qualitative research, Mills and Bettis (2006) state that this influence places an "extra obligation on qualitative researchers to question ourselves; to seek out alternative data, interpretations, and explanation; and to doubt our framings and understanding" (p. 83). Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) state the required processing of raw data may be accomplished in many ways and as a result may produce rather different texts and ultimately can be problematic. Therefore, it is imperative for the qualitative researcher to consider ethical

components of qualitative research methods and how the approach affects the validity of the results (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Robson, 2002). This chapter will now consider the characteristics of specific strategies used within qualitative research.

Grounded Theory

The grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory not only seeks to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and the consequences of their actions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The researcher carefully orders the questions, constantly compares the findings, observations, and experiences, and attempts to allow the specific context of the situation to dictate the direction of the study (Patton, 2002). The primary objective of grounded theory, then, is to expand upon an explanation of a phenomenon by identifying the key elements of that phenomenon, and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to the context and process of the experiment. In other words, the goal is to go from the general to the specific without losing sight of what makes the subject of a study unique (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Case Study

To investigate the research questions of this study, a case study design was adopted. A case study is “an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a process, an institution, or a social group” (Merriam, 1988, p. 9). Yin (2008) explains the case study is the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are

being posed and is an appropriate strategy when the “investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1). In addition, Yin (2008) describes that the case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a variety of evidence such as documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations beyond what might be available in the conventional historical study.

Unit of analysis. Patton (2002) affirms a single case study allows for concentrated research on the unique aspects of the subject and is an appropriate unit of analysis when the research’s goal is to provide in-depth, context specific research. Creswell (2007) explains one of the most critical components within the case study strategy is determining the unit of analysis. In this study, the unit of analysis was the superintendent of a Texas public school district. The focus of this study was to examine the factors district leaders, namely superintendents, consider when deciding on a curriculum.

Multiple-case research design. While much case study research focuses on a single case often selected because of its unique characteristics, the multiple-case studies design allows the researcher to explore the phenomena under study through the use of a replication strategy (Yin, 2008). Additional respondents are selected for study because they are expected to yield similar data or different but predictable findings (Schwandt, 2001). Stake (2003) indicated these designs are collective case studies. According to Stake (2003), collective case studies involve:

the study of a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition...[who] are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases. (p. 437)

Therefore, Onweugbuzie and Leech (2007) state when qualitative research designs involving multiple case are employed, a central goal of the researcher is to compare and contrast the selected cases; thus, a cross-case analysis is a natural choice. A cross-case analysis involves analyzing data across the cases (Schwandt, 2001). Multiple case research design provides the range of applicability of explanatory patterns within a designated target population of cases (Onweugbuzie & Leech (2007).

Yin (2008) explains in the multiple-case studies design, there are no exacting rules about how many cases or respondents are required to satisfy the requirements of the replication strategy that is inherent upon the multiple-case design and as long as the number of studies “provide compelling support for the initial set of propositions” (p. 46). This study focused on six Texas public school systems and their respective superintendents in order to explain the factors superintendents consider when selecting curriculum.

Respondent selection process: Superintendents and public school districts.

Superintendents of six public school districts in the state of Texas were selected for interviews based on their experience as superintendent in their current district. The state of Texas is divided into 20 educational regions that are served by Regional Educational Service Centers. For the purpose of this study, public school districts and their respective superintendents were selected from Region 10 with Richardson, Texas, being the center site, Region 12 with Waco, Texas, being the center site, and Region 13 with Austin, Texas, being the center site. Purposeful sampling based on maximum variation

(Creswell, 2007) was used to select six districts varying in size utilizing either a locally developed curriculum or a commercially developed curriculum.

For this study, districts were categorized into three groups based on student populations gathered from the 2009-2010 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The three categories are: 0-15,500 students, which was labeled as a small district; 15,001-35,500 students, which was labeled as a midsize district; and more than 35,501 students, which was labeled as a large district. Two Texas public school districts, one utilizing a locally developed and one utilizing a commercially developed curriculum were selected from the small district category. Two Texas public school districts, one utilizing a locally developed and one utilizing a commercially developed curriculum were selected from the midsize district category. Two Texas public school districts, one utilizing a locally developed and one utilizing a commercially developed curriculum were selected from the large district category. These selections were determined by the factors Patton (1990) explained as the logic and power of purposeful sampling that lies in selecting information-rich cases for in depth study.

Respondent description: Superintendents and public school districts.

Superintendents were selected based on his or her experience as being the current superintendent or the superintendent within the last three years of the district. This selection criteria was to ensure the superintendent was involved and familiar with the decision-making process of the district's curriculum choice. Small A Independent School District is located in Region 13, serves 6,902 students, and utilizes a locally developed curriculum. Small B Independent School District is located in Region 12, serves 15,254

students, and utilizes a commercially developed curriculum. Midsize A Independent School District is located in Region 10, serves 26,293 students, and utilizes a commercially developed curriculum. Midsize B Independent School District is located in Region 13, serves 30,321 students, and utilizes a locally developed curriculum. Large A Independent School District is located in Region 12, serves 39,523 students, and utilizes a commercially developed curriculum. Large B Independent School District is located in Region 13, serves 42,777 students, and utilizes a locally developed curriculum. Table 1 provides a comparison between the six Texas public school districts selected for this study.

Table 1

Six Texas Public Independent School Districts

District	Student Population	Region	Curriculum
Small A ISD	6,902	13	Locally developed
Small B ISD	15,254	12	Commercially developed
Midsize A ISD	26,293	10	Commercially developed
Midsize B ISD	30,321	13	Locally developed
Large A ISD	39,523	12	Commercially developed
Large B ISD	42,777	13	Locally developed

Note. Student populations are based on 2009-2010 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) provided by the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Procedures and Data Collection

Both Mertens (2005) and Patton (2002) assert that the researcher is the primary instrument of qualitative studies. Furthermore, in keeping with this study’s qualitative research method and with the data collection techniques suggested in regards to the strategy of case study design (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990; Yin, 2008), it is imperative to collect from multiple sources of data. The literature explains there are three

main data sources in relation to qualitative research: (a) interviews, (b) written documents, and direct observations (Mertens, 2005; Patton; 1990; Trochim, 2000). For this study, data sources were collected primarily from interviews and document review.

Interviews allow access to “how respondents think or feel about something and provide valuable insights into the affective and cognitive underpinnings of your respondents’ perceptions” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 93). Yin (2008) states one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview and is a research tool designed for the purpose of improving knowledge (Wengraf, 2001). Interviews may be regarded as a means of gaining direct access to a respondent’s experience; and if created carefully, the questions will elicit responses in the form of authentic perceptions (Schwandt, 2001). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) compare interviewing to playing ball; however, the researcher is unlike the pitcher whose “joy derives from throwing balls the batter never touch” (p. 118). Instead, “you toss questions which you want your respondents to hit and hit well in every corner of your data park, if not clear out of it; a swatted home run of words” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 118) The interviews conducted during this study afforded the researcher with a more comprehensive understanding of perceptions relating to curriculum choice.

Description of interviews. The qualitative researcher may choose a specific type of interview strategy to accommodate a particular research frame and purpose (Yin, 2008). Interviews have been labeled and categorized in various ways such as: (a) structured, (b) semi-structured, or (c) open-ended (Creswell, 2003; Wengraf, 2001). For this study, in order to elicit views and opinions from the respondents as they share events,

perceptions, and experiences in response to questions derived from the case study protocol (Wengraf, 2001; Yin, 2008), a semi-structured interview method was utilized. From the participant's initial responses, the interviewer asked additional probing questions in order to gain a deeper understanding of the material (Wengraf, 2001; Yin, 2008). Respondents, at times during an interview, may give an inappropriate or incomplete answer; in such cases, a probe or request for an elaboration can be useful (Babbie, 2004). Babbie (2004) continues to define a probe as a technique employed in interviewing to solicit a more comprehensive and complete answer to a question and is a nondirective phrase or question. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) describes semi-structured interviews as allowing the conversation to flow more naturally, making room for the conversation to progress in new and unexpected directions.

Semi-structured interviewing will potentially allow the researcher to corroborate facts that have been uncovered through research and data collection (Yin, 2008); this was the case in this study. Wengraf (2001) explains the success of the interview is greatly dependent upon the interviewer's skills of asking, listening, and talking as well as inducing the appropriate probing questions to be asked at the appropriate time. It is essential to understand that the data capture and analysis of the semi-structured interview may be lengthy and time-consuming that may result in a limitation regarding the reliability of the information (Knight, 2002). Therefore, the interviewer must be prepared with an interview design to avoid faltering when making critical decisions regarding appropriateness and timing, all of which can affect the quality and significance of the interview data (Knight, 2002).

Interview procedures. Each selected superintendent was sent a recruitment letter via email requesting participation. Consent of the respondent was acquired after the interviewer explained the purpose of the research. Each respondent was interviewed by the researcher, and the researcher used the initial created interview questions as well as asked for clarifying information when necessary. The semi-structured interview protocol used for this study is found in Appendix A with an accompanying addendum found in Appendix B. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) state there is benefit and value in having initial interviews transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews are conducted to secure accuracy in recognizing potentially important themes. To ensure examination data trends, themes, and application regarding the research questions, the content of the interview was transcribed by the researcher.

Document Review

The second type of data collection method applied in this study was document review. Document review refers to various procedures involved in analyzing and interpreting data generated from the examination of documents and records relevant to a particular study (Schwandt, 2001). The qualitative researcher analyzes official and public documents to learn about the people who write and maintain them because these materials lend insight into the perspectives, assumptions, concerns, and activities of those who produce them (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Document review can provide an established source of information that can be reviewed repeatedly, with broad coverage of time, events, and settings, and can provide important clues to the history of the setting (Morse & Richards, 2002). “The texts and objects that groups of humans produce are

embedded with larger ideas those groups have, whether shared or contested” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 286). Several types of documents were analyzed for the purpose of this study: most specifically organizational charts, curriculum maps, instructional sequences, vertical alignment documents, year-at-a-glance documents, curriculum development schedules, and curriculum resources.

Miles and Huberman (1994) reveal documents are often lengthy and typically need clarifying and summarizing and as the researcher, it is critical to know the document’s significance in relation to what it tells the researcher about the site that is important. It may serve well to the researcher to create and fill out a document summary form that can be attached to the document it refers to in order to put the document in context, explain its significance, and gives a brief summary (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this study, a document summary was used.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the nonnumeric assessment of observations, made through participant observation, content analysis, in-depth interviews, and other qualitative research strategies (Babbie, 2004). Babbie (2004) states in quantitative research, “it is sometimes easy to get caught up in the logistics of data collection and in the statistical analysis of data, thereby losing sight of theory for a time” (p. 370). Babbie (2004) continues to explain this is less likely to occur in qualitative research, where data collection, analysis, and theory are more intimately intertwined. Patton (2002) asserts with the data that is massed together after collection, the challenge resides in making sense of it all. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain each wave of data collection should

be accompanied with a corresponding exercise in condensation and analysis; thus, coding is an essential component of data analysis. Each of the data sources acquired in this study was examined through a grounded theory process delineated by Strauss and Corbin (1998) that includes three stages of coding: (a) open coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) selective coding (Mertens, 2005).

Open coding. Open coding is the part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through the close examination of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). “During open coding the data are broken down into discreet parts closely examined, compared for similarities and differences and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 62). Open coding is a repetitive process; the codes developed during the initial stage will be reviewed and refined through multiple passes with the data (Patton, 2002). During this study, this process continued throughout the data collection phase in order to “cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 50).

Axial coding. Axial coding is the next stage after open coding and in this stage, data are put together in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While open coding attempts to name and categorize individual incidents, axial coding is the “process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed ‘axial’ because coding occurs around the axis of the category” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). In axial coding, further development of categories takes place and one continues to look for indications of them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Mertens (2005) explains that as possible relationships are identified, the

researcher continues to search for additional evidence to refute or support the presence of absence of these relationships. This is considered a critical stage in the grounded theory analytical process (Patton, 2002).

Selective coding. Selective coding is the process by which all categories are unified around a “core” category, and categories that need further clarification are filled-in with descriptive detail (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through selective coding, qualitative researchers may look for one core category to build their storyline around; all other categories will be related to or subsumed to this central category or theme (Mertens, 2005). Given its role as an integrating concept, it is not surprising selective coding generally occurs in the latter stages in the data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Additional coding framework. In addition, the 10 functions of school districts/superintendents as outlined in the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guide* served as a coding framework for analyzing the factors superintendents consider in selecting a curriculum that was aggregated from the interviews.

Reliability and Validity

The criteria for validating the quality of qualitative research are varied among researchers considering the complex and expanding nature of the research method (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2008). Therefore, to ensure validity of the data, following the four criterion: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability, outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is essential.

Credibility. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the concept of credibility is the extent to which findings and interpretations correspond between the way participants

perceived their social constructs and how the principal researcher interprets his or her original viewpoints. Schwandt (2001) also confirms credibility addresses the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between respondents' views and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of the same. Addressing this concern, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain the fundamental need to demonstrate credibility through a variety of strategies including data triangulation (Glesne, 1999; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Yin, 2008), member checking (Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mertens, 1998), and peer debriefing (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mertens, 1998; Moss, 1994).

Triangulation of the data. The strategy of triangulation of the data is often associated with the assumption that data from different sources or methods must necessarily converge on or be aggregated to reveal the truth (Schwandt, 2001). "In other words, triangulation is both possible and necessary because research is a process of discovery in which the genuine meaning residing within an action event can be best uncovered by viewing it from different vantage points" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 257). Yin (2005) discloses triangulation of data establishes converging lines of evidence, which as a result, will contribute to robust findings and add depth to research. Stake (2005) defines triangulation as "the process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (p. 454). Schwandt (2001) affirms triangulation is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) continue by stating triangulation of data includes two or more methods of data collection to answer the same research questions. For this study, data

were extracted from different sources associated with the school district, specifically interviews and document reviews.

Member checking. Schwandt (2001) defines member checking as soliciting feedback from respondents on the inquirer's findings and is a key procedure for corroborating or verifying findings or of ensuring they are valid. Member checking is a strategy where the researcher takes the final report or specific description or themes back to the participants and allows the participants to verify their accuracy (Creswell, 2003). For this study, written records and transcriptions of interviews were presented to the participants and feedback was solicited to ensure there were no misinterpretations of collected data prior to the publication of the findings.

Peer debriefing. Creswell (2003) states in order to provide an additional point of view and a more objective approach to the study, an outside person should regularly review the study and ask clarifying questions. According to Moss (1994), researchers should not base their interpretations on their analysis of the data alone, but also on a rational debate among a community of interpreters. For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified a fellow doctoral student from The University of Texas to assist with peer debriefing. The researcher met with this peer throughout the study to discuss and analyze emerging data.

Transferability. Guba and Lincoln (1989) define transferability as “an empirical process for checking the degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts” (p. 241). Transferability, which is parallel to external validity, deals with the issue of generalization in terms of case-to-case transfer in which the findings in a particular study

can be applied to other contexts (Schwandt, 2001). To enhance transferability, researchers use thick description by providing extensive and careful description of the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Accordingly, for the purpose of this study, the researcher provided multiple examples and significant detail for each of the claims (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 1998).

Dependability. Parallel to reliability, dependability focuses on the process of the inquiry and the inquirer's responsibility for ensuring that the process is logical, traceable, and documented (Schwandt, 2001). As it relates to the case study research model, Yin (2008) describes this process as maintaining a case study protocol and case study database, which is "a formal assembly of evidence distinct from the final case study report" (p. 98) This process will chronicle the steps taken during the study and minimize the errors and biases in the study (Yin, 2008). For the purpose of this study, when changes were imposed during the study and deterred from the initial, comprehensive proposal describing the data collection and data analysis, the researcher recorded these changes to enhance the study's dependability.

Confirmability. In regards to confirmability, the researcher describes how "data, interpretations, and outcomes are rooted in contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and are not simply figments of the evaluator's imagination" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243). Mertens (1998) explains that in order to ensure confirmability, researchers must clearly demonstrate the connection between the findings and the collected data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend a confirmability audit as its primary strategy to measure how well the researcher's findings are supported by the data collected and not by the

biases or motivations of the researcher. For the purpose of this study, the researcher maintained a detailed case study database and audit trail of all data collected. Yin (2008) referred to this data concept of data collection for a case study as providing a “chain of evidence,” which are “explicit links among the questions asked, the data collected, and the conclusions drawn” (p. 98).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the traits for the research design, the methods for data collection, the procedures for the study, and the data analysis strategies that were employed during this study. This methodology was used to determine the factors superintendents consider when selecting a curriculum for his or her respective public school district.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to determine the impinging factors and the respective variables that influence and guide the superintendent's decision-making process in selecting a curriculum. In addition, considering the numerous and complex functions that define the operational nature of school systems, this study also investigated how overseeing curriculum impacts the other leadership and managerial responsibilities of the modern superintendent. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What factors do superintendents consider in selecting a curriculum?
2. How do these factors impact the decision to use a commercially developed curriculum or to use a locally developed curriculum?
3. How does the decision-making process regarding curriculum selection correlate with other functions of the superintendent and the school district?

The data collected described the experiences and perspectives of six Texas school superintendents regarding curriculum choice and the overseeing of curriculum within their districts. Three of the six superintendents and their respective districts use a commercially developed curriculum and three superintendents and their respective districts use a locally developed curriculum. This study contributes to the literature in the field of leadership in the modern superintendency as it relates to the pressing issues facing education relating to the school function of curriculum and instruction and how this function impacts other functions within the district.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the study. A case overview will be provided, and then the findings for each research question will be discussed. This research investigated superintendents' reflections and considerations regarding the implications of taking on the challenge of curriculum and instruction leadership as well as how overseeing curriculum impacts and integrates into the administrative role and complexities of the modern superintendent.

Case Study Overview

Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) was used to select six school districts varying in size utilizing either a commercially developed curriculum or a locally developed curriculum. Districts were categorized into three groups based on student population gathered from the 2009-2010 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) from Texas Education Agency (TEA). In addition to student population and the use of locally or commercially developed curriculum, superintendents were selected based on his or her experience as being the current superintendent or the superintendent of the district within the last three years; this ensured that the superintendent selected for this study was involved and familiar with the decision-making process of the district's curriculum choice.

The selected participants represented leaders with years of superintendency experience ranging from two years to five years with the district in which they responded to the researcher's questions. The participants were from different ethnic backgrounds and five of the participants were male and one participant was female.

Adhering to the case study design and considering the appropriateness of a participant for a particular study based on accessibility, the probability of the participant talking honestly, and the experience he or she has of the subject in question (Wengraf, 2001), the participants were purposefully selected accordingly as well as selecting participants from districts varying in size.

This study intended to describe the experiences of six school superintendents who have served in this capacity for enough time to have developed a perspective in relation to curriculum choice for their respective districts. During semistructured interviews, questions posed to the participants were organized around the following themes: (a) importance of curriculum along with time devoted to overseeing curriculum and how this relates to other responsibilities of the superintendent; (b) the factors considered when deciding curriculum choice; (c) the pros and cons of commercially developed curriculum and locally developed curriculum; and (d) the challenges associated with curriculum. This questioning framework along with the review of documents relating to curriculum guided the development of the findings and provided structure for the reporting of data and analysis. The data collected through the interviews and document review were coded according to first-level coding and pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and were triangulated to find converging themes within the research (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1990; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2005).

Research Question 1

What factors do superintendents consider in selecting a curriculum? The Texas superintendents expressed in detail the different factors they considered when selecting a

curriculum or deciding to continue using their current curriculum of choice. Emerging themes related to these responses were the current state and context of the district, academic gaps within the current curriculum and the necessity of alignment, and time needed for maintaining curriculum, which is associated with finances and personnel. As superintendents explained these factors impacting their decisions and choices relating to curriculum, it was apparent that though a factor may stand alone; many times the factors were intertwined and contingent upon one another.

Current State and Context of the District

The superintendent of Small A ISD explained that curriculum is contextually based and the context of the district in terms of academic success, demographics, personnel (namely teachers), and resource allocations and finances are all variables and factors that weigh in on the decision of curriculum choice. Collins (2001) explains the importance of examining essentially the context clues of the district to completely comprehend the needs of the district. “You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts” (p. 70). The superintendent of Small A ISD continued to explain:

I think it was Fenwick English that said the higher degree of at-risk or needs in your school district, the tighter the curriculum has to be. For us, when you take the context of who we are, that drives, for me, what we need to address. If I were working in a very affluent school district then I would probably tell you a different answer in terms of what we need for curriculum, but because of the students we serve and the type of environment we are in, my curriculum choice is critical.

Diverse learning populations, as a result of rapid student growth, pose additional challenges for district leadership and present unique problems regarding addressing using a curriculum that meets the needs of all learners (Ivory & Acker-Hocevar, 2007).

Academic Gaps and Curriculum Alignment

The necessity to close academic gaps was a factor that several superintendents identified as being a high priority and that in order to close those academic gaps, “a guaranteed and viable curriculum” (Marzano, 2003) is tantamount. The superintendent for Large A ISD stated:

I think you have to step back as Superintendent and ask, “What am I trying to do?” If you are trying to support the classroom teacher, then what tools does the classroom teacher really need? They need a guaranteed and viable curriculum, and even Marzano’s meta-analysis says the number one factor that contributes to achieving student success is a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

The superintendent of Small B ISD explained that ongoing academic gaps in Small B ISD resulted in eight schools being rated “unacceptable” by the state’s accountability system and the district never having schools receive an “exemplary” rating, all of which this superintendent stated was a result of failing curriculum. The superintendent continued by saying:

The academic success of the district is all based on the curriculum. If teachers do not have a curriculum that is going to lay it out for them on what they should be doing, when they should be doing it, then they are just going to flounder. And as long as they flounder, you are not going to get the success that you need and your academic gaps will continue to increase.

The literature asserts the necessity of having the curriculum aligned to the state standards and sequentially how this determines student success on state accountability assessments, all in which is an exacting issue superintendents are faced with continuously

(Petersen & Young, 2004). Furthermore, alignment is crucial to an overall effective curriculum (La Marca et al., 2000). Several of the six superintendents referenced alignment as a key factor when considering curriculum choice. The superintendent of Large B ISD stated, “What the district has and is testing must be aligned to what the state has and what the state is testing.” Additionally, a superintendent (Small A ISD) explained that if there is misalignment with the state standards and state assessments, there will be huge chaos, teachers will not have ownership in the curriculum, and as a result, frustration will insert and the curriculum will go nowhere. The superintendent of Midsize A ISD said, “Without a vertically and horizontally aligned curriculum, we are spinning our wheels.”

Time, Finances, and Personnel

The state of Texas has established cycles of refinement and alignment within the content curriculum standards; consequently, each year different content curriculum standards are revised, added to, and deleted, which then positions school districts to implement the revised standards and modify the district’s curriculum accordingly. These changes impose school districts to rework, rewrite, realign, and execute revised curriculum all of which requires a substantial amount of time, personnel, and funding. These were all factors the superintendents in this study elaborated on in regards to curriculum choice. The superintendents explained that correlating to the continual state changes is challenging because the district needs to have adequate personnel to manage and complete this work and this work can be very time intensive; and both of those factors generate the additional factor of having sufficient funding that must always be

considered. The superintendent of Midsize B ISD explained that the curriculum is in constant flux, and it takes an extensive amount of time, staff, and budget to ensure the district has a guaranteed and viable curriculum. The superintendent continued, “You have to have people working on it all the time; it is expensive.” One superintendent (Large A ISD) stated, “The biggest challenge related to it (curriculum) is how do you find time to get it done?” Several elaborated on the current budget challenges that are approaching all school districts and the superintendent of Large B ISD said:

It is going to be tougher for us to have the dollars to continue to invest in maintaining curriculum. I guess related to finances, I can say for us though we are going to continue to find the dollars just because we have to. It makes a difference in how our kids do. So that’s going to be there even though it will be a factor to consider and a challenge.

Along with having ample personnel to maintain curriculum, an additional factor related to personnel that superintendents considered concerning curriculum choice is the level of expertise the personnel has in order to maintain curriculum effectively. The superintendent of Small B ISD clarified that districts may have staff who are trying their hardest and doing their best, but lack the knowledge and content knowledge of what is needed in the curriculum and ultimately in the classroom. Superintendent of Small A ISD explained that having personnel who amply understand the concept of curriculum is essential and having those people or not can impact your curriculum. Thus, having qualified personnel is a factor this superintendent explained is extremely important to consider when making any decisions regarding curriculum.

Research Question 2

How do these factors impact the decision to use a commercially developed curriculum or to use a locally developed curriculum? The data collected through the interviews with the six superintendents revealed that the superintendents were very passionate and committed to their curriculum choice. The factors that emerged during the collection for research question 1 were elaborated on in connection with their choice of using a locally or commercially developed curriculum.

Current State and Context of the District

Beginning with the factor associated with the context of the district, the concept of being able to personally manage and oversee curriculum based on district needs and academic success was a factor all three superintendents using a locally developed curriculum expressed. These three superintendents explained that the continual progress of the district's academic performance is in part a testament to their locally developed curriculum. The superintendent of Large B ISD stated that his district has always used locally developed curriculum and a review of documents from the district outlined the locally developed curriculum contains: At-A-Glance maps for the year, Recommended Instructional Timelines, which provide specificity, model lessons, and differentiated strategies. The superintendent explained:

Historically we have prided ourselves in saying we have our own curriculum. We are heavily invested, but that's not the reason we stay with it. We stay with it because it works very well for us. We feel we get a better product because we have developed it ourselves. We have control over it and are able to make changes quickly.

Further, the superintendent of Midsize B ISD explained that they have had locally developed curriculum for years and years. Fenwick English did a curriculum audit approximately 13 years ago for Midsize B ISD and as a result, made extensive improvements in the development of curriculum. The superintendent continued to explain they have continued to make improvements and leaps ever since. After reviewing documents from Midsize B ISD, it was evident the curriculum contained a Year-At-A-Glance for each content and grade level, Big Ideas for the Content, and Unit Summaries that provide specificity for the unit objectives. This superintendent stated:

It was always about how are we going to do this? It was never about are we going to go buy something? There is a reason we are independent school districts and that is because we are independent communities. There are differences. We are different than A ISD; we are different than B ISD, different than C ISD, not that there is any right or wrong, we are just different. If we are able to be agile to the needs of our community, our kiddos, and add accordingly to our curriculum—imbed, change it, take away, add to it, that is a serious pro for having locally developed curriculum. I have yet to see anything you can just pull off the shelf and be super effective. There are no magic bullets. Many may think you can plug something in like a commercially developed curriculum and it's going to solve all the problems we have, but it's not. You still have to bring in the local sense and sensibility into it.

Conversely, other superintendents claim that the context of the district can impact the decision to use a commercially developed curriculum. The superintendent of Midsize A ISD recounted that when taking on the superintendency at Midsize A ISD, there essentially was no curriculum. The superintendent stated, “When I began, the district had unacceptable schools, it was rated acceptable—barely in many areas. There was a growing Hispanic population; there were board issues. The district was broken.” The superintendent continued by saying that the district thought they had a curriculum, but essentially, they did not, and they could not afford another day to pass without having a

proven curriculum; thus the district began using a commercially developed curriculum. The superintendent of Midsize A ISD provided the researcher with a document referred to as the bridging document. This document outlined the components of the curriculum, which include Vertical Alignment Documents to provide the scope, TEKS Verification to provide the sequence, Year-At-A-Glance documents to also provide sequence and suggested number of days for instruction, Instructional Focus Documents to provide the bridge between curriculum and instruction by bundling specified expectations accompanied with rationale, and exemplar lessons along with textbook pages and TAKS practice.

Similarly, the superintendent of Small B ISD explained when taking on the role of superintendent, immediately it was apparent there was not a curriculum in place and the district was suffering academically. The superintendent stated:

I knew we didn't have time to start from scratch. So the first year I was there I brought with me the curriculum from my previous district, and then eventually we moved over to a commercially developed curriculum. It (curriculum) was nonexistent. Campuses were doing their own thing; no district support as far as we will use this curriculum; no scope and sequence. I knew we all needed to be on the same page—32 schools.

However, still considering the context of the district, this superintendent envisioned a hybrid of sorts regarding curriculum. The superintendent continues:

We knew that the commercially developed curriculum would not be enough, but a good minimum. Our district with eight unacceptable schools and a very high economically disadvantaged population, our kids do not come with those prior resources and knowledge. We knew we had to make adjustments to the curriculum. Because for example, where they said you can cover this unit in a particular amount of time, we knew for our students we would have to allow more time. They may say two days; we knew we needed to give four or five days. Our Content Specialists looked at those details and made those adjustments to meet the needs of our students.

Academic Gaps and Curriculum Alignment

The collection of data gathered from the interviews disclosed the context of the district as well as academic gaps and alignment that were interrelated factors when impacting the decision to use commercially or locally developed curriculum. Several superintendents explained that analyzing district data is a strategic component surrounding curriculum. The literature attests that if the data exposes academic gaps, then the curriculum needs to address those gaps (Downey, 2003). The superintendent of Small A ISD explained within the district they have multiple layers and different lenses and measures in place to sift through and see where the district is and where they need to make changes in regards to curriculum. The superintendent stated:

A very important part of academic success is having an ongoing systematic data collection and analysis process and then using that information in relation to the curriculum. If there are gaps, overlaps, misalignment, or misopportunities, they can immediately be addressed in the curriculum. If not addressed, you are losing instructional time.

Superintendent of Large B ISD stated the same premise of the necessity to make changes immediately based on district performance whether it is due to identified academic gaps or identified alignment issues. The superintendent said that analyzing data at the Central Office level helps determine changes that need to be made and those changes can be made immediately. The superintendent continued to explain:

We are able to see firsthand if there is an alignment issue and match it to the state curriculum. The quickness that we are able to address any issue from a curriculum standpoint—whether it is a timing issue or rigor issue, whether it doesn't match the test, we can address that; we can change that, it's ours, we're here, we've got the personnel to do those things. Being able to change the curriculum based on your district's needs that quickly—with a commercial curriculum piece, you don't get that. If twenty folks are using it (a commercially

created curriculum) and that change that your district needs and wants doesn't fit everybody, would they make that change?

Moreover, the superintendents using locally developed curriculum stated that when addressing academic gaps, a locally developed curriculum allows the district to employ their design choice. For example, the superintendent of Small A ISD explained that they can reformat the depth of their curriculum based on student need and do so continuously using the backwards design model. The literature states that if a district has schools with low-performing scores on state tests, it is absolutely imperative that the district's curriculum deeply backload from the external test (English, 2000). With the assessment driving the curriculum, this superintendent explained Small A ISD has experienced academic improvements.

Equally, in regards to the factors of academic gaps and alignment, superintendents using commercially developed curriculum explained these factors are key in impacting their decision to use commercially developed curriculum. The superintendent of Small B ISD stated that the district was struggling with science and math, and apparently the central cause for this was the lack of quality curriculum in those areas; thus, when the district purchased commercially developed curriculum, their initial implementation plan was to require teachers to use the commercially developed curriculum for math and science only. The superintendent continued, "Once the teachers became comfortable with math and science and began seeing results, they wanted to go ahead and use the other subjects as well." In addition, Small B ISD saw there were issues with alignment with the state assessment and their instructional sequence that needed to be addressed. The literature indicates sequencing the learning objectives so they are mastered well in

advance of being tested is a strategic and substantial element in curriculum (Jacobs, 2004). Glatthorn et al. (2009) explain the scope defines placing objectives in the curriculum earlier so students have adequate time to demonstrate if mastery has been reached. This was an issue Small B ISD faced and the superintendent stated:

There was no question on anyone's part that there were missing pieces because my first year, when we did a curriculum audit through the Dana Center, we found out that in math and science there were several units that were out of place. They either should have been taught at an earlier time or in a different level or they were completely left out. So when we broke down our data, way too many kids were unsuccessful due to these curriculum gaps, many because of sequencing. We did not have enough time to fill these gaps, so we went with one (curriculum) that was already proven.

The researcher asked the superintendents who used commercially developed curriculum, all of which used the same commercial product, if they saw a need to change the sequence, could they make those changes at the district level? The superintendent of Large A ISD explained that the scope and sequence is dictated by the curriculum product; however, the district does modify it somewhat and works with the commercial vendor to make adjustments based on the comments and feedback from teachers. The superintendent expanded:

For example, in kindergarten there is a unit in science where they are planting seeds in January. Is that the best time to be doing that? Probably not. So we have discussions like that—does it need to be there; does it need to be moved to some other part of the curriculum? The beauty of the product is there is a great deal of alignment between the scope and sequence and the assessments. So we try to be hands-off of the scope and sequence as much as possible. That doesn't mean we absolutely follow it to the letter. One of the struggles for us is that we are on a nine weeks grading period and the curriculum is actually structured around six weeks grading periods, so we have already had to make modifications to align the curriculum with our nine weeks grading period.

When asked if districts could change the sequence within the commercially created curriculum, the superintendent of Midsize A ISD said, “I wouldn’t. But the answer is yes, because we did find a standard that was not being taught until after the test, so we moved it. If there is something we want to change, we change it through Region 13.”

Time, Personnel, and Finances

The factors of time, personnel, and finances were all discussed in detail by the superintendents as impacting their decision to use either a commercially developed or locally developed curriculum. For research question 2, these factors were looked at individually. Time was a prevalent theme that emerged in respecting factors impacting curriculum choice. With the state standards incessantly changing as well as state assessments and accountability requirements, maintaining a comprehensive curriculum is becoming more and more of an exigent assignment for school districts. Whether districts use commercially or locally developed curriculum, all six superintendents compellingly stated maintaining and sustaining curriculum is challenging. The superintendent of Small A ISD explained that curriculum is always in a beta version: never complete and always changing. Further, the superintendent of Large B ISD stated the greatest challenge has been and will continue to be the updating of curriculum and that it becomes very demanding for district staff. The superintendent continued by saying that particularly the emphasis of preparing students for college and the 21st century are both variables that push the envelope for districts with locally developed curriculum and for the commercial pieces, because they have to update their curriculum as well. When deciding between using locally or commercially developed curriculum, superintendents using commercially

developed stated that time is a chief factor impacting curriculum choice. The superintendent of Midsize A ISD stated:

Ten years ago I would have said, “Oh, we need to develop our own curriculum; they are our schools. The state can give us essential knowledge and skills, but I need to work with my staff to develop our own curriculum so that we own it.” But I have a greater sense of urgency now. We can’t afford to let our kids languish for a year while we fool around writing curriculum. There’s good work out there that other people have done.

The superintendent of Large A ISD expressed similar opinions. After explaining the significant requisite of having a guaranteed and viable curriculum, this superintendent said:

The next question is can you get it, a guaranteed and viable curriculum, by creating it locally? Well, I think there was a time when you could, but I think that time is long gone because now we have this constant percolation of curriculum in the state. We have changing assessments at the state level. You just have a whole lot of things that in many ways, I think, are forcing districts to kind of abandon developing local curriculum. A pro for commercially developed curriculum is it gives districts the ability to sustain a guaranteed and viable curriculum for your classroom teachers across the district especially in times like we are faced with now where everything is changing. Locally developed curriculum is almost beyond the capacity of a district, certainly our district and probably any school district in Texas. Maintaining its currency over time...I just don’t think you can do it. You have to go to the marketplace to purchase a curriculum.

Though superintendents using locally developed curriculum recognize the time obstacle facing their district staff, all three superintendents do not see that as such an obstacle that they would abandon locally developed curriculum. After reviewing documents from all three districts using locally developed curriculum, each district had timelines of revision work based on the revisions from the state and based on district data when necessary. The superintendent of Small A ISD explained that in relation to having

the time to maintain curriculum is connected to hiring the right people. The superintendent continued:

You hire folks that do it (curriculum work) well. You dedicate that whole to that world. Like someone in Human Resource may have some cross over responsibilities like in safety or technology, but someone in curriculum is solely dedicated to curriculum, in my opinion. That's my leadership style. I try to keep C & I (curriculum and instruction) in that one world because it is that important. It is important to keep that job and department as pure as possible. It's doable.

The superintendent of Small A ISD continued by explaining that having a locally developed curriculum does not mean anything else is needed such as an instructional management system. The superintendent said: "I believe in going out and finding a framework that we can use to dump in if you will, what we use, our content, our sequence, model lessons and make it all user-friendly. I do believe in buying some skeletal structure."

The Legislative Budget Board (2009) described the necessity of the superintendent examining the exigency of managing curriculum and to consider implementing a management system that provides a comprehensive, consistent, fully integrated platform that facilitates stakeholders at all levels in maintaining a continuous focus on improving student learning and mastery. The superintendent of Small B ISD stated, "Whether a district uses a locally developed or commercially developed curriculum, it is becoming more apparent that districts need an instructional management system to keep it all together."

Regarding personnel, hiring the right people with the level of expertise needed to maintain curriculum efficiently can be a challenge as the superintendents using commercially developed curriculum affirmed. The superintendent of Small B ISD said:

We had strong ELA folks. We had some strong social studies folks, but we didn't have strong science and math folks. So instead of relying on one or two people that may not be experts in those contents, you now have a curriculum that is from a large group of experts.

The superintendent of Midsize A ISD concurred by explaining that commercially developed curriculum is created by professionals, usually people who have graduate degrees: people who know how to write curriculum, how to write questions, and how to imbed vocabulary. The superintendent concluded, "Teachers as brilliant as they are, do not write curriculum; teachers write lesson plans." In addition, the superintendent for Small B ISD explained the commercially developed curriculum they purchased was credible by reason of the experts who developed it and the results they were already yielding with their current clients. This superintendent expressed:

You have a lot of people involved who are experts in that area, so it's more than likely going to be proven before it goes out to districts. We felt good about that—that other districts with a high success rate were using it. We felt the state was supportive of it because more and more districts each year were jumping on board. You can also use that with your teachers—"This is a curriculum that has been developed, approved, and getting results." There was more credibility to it and teachers were feeling that—"This must be a good curriculum if all those experts got together to develop it." They would ask what other districts were using it and when they saw their results, that helped.

In contrast, the superintendents using locally developed curriculum do not discount the level of expertise of their staff responsible for building and maintaining their curriculum.

The superintendent of Midsize B ISD stated:

When a certain commercially developed curriculum was first rolled out, I did send some of my curriculum folks to something at Region 13 and there was nothing wrong with it, but we had just so much ownership from the teachers who had worked on our curriculum all this time—very smart folks. And again, as a larger school district, we have the opportunity to have personnel like coordinators, facilitators who are constantly looking at these specific areas. So I felt our curriculum was full. What we had was robust and working for us.

This superintendent's comment regarding that as a larger school district the number of personnel was a contributing factor to the using and maintaining of their locally developed curriculum connects to an analogous comment made by the superintendent of Small B ISD. This superintendent stated, "The reason so many small districts use it I think is because they do not have the people, and they rely on the Service Center and what they can provide. Larger school districts may not have that issue." Countering that comment, the superintendent of Small A ISD expressed:

Small districts, in my opinion, may think, "I do not have the personnel. I do not have the expertise. I do not have the time to develop the expertise, so I will just buy it." But why wouldn't you want to develop that within your organization? It goes back to sustainability. You need to build and establish people and systems. It is important to develop leadership, even among your teachers. People who help to create will help to promote.

Cost and having sufficient funds are factors the superintendents affirmed impact the decision to use either locally or commercially developed curriculum. The superintendent of Large A ISD stated one of the negatives to commercially developed curriculum is the cost associated with it and said they are not necessarily cheap. The superintendent of Small B ISD also stated cost was a factor in deciding to use a commercially developed curriculum and continued:

The commercially developed curriculum we purchased is not something you pay the first year and it's yours to keep. You pay each year. When you are using a locally developed curriculum you are using your own people, your own resources, and you're not worried about forking over several thousands of dollars every year.

Nevertheless, the superintendent of Midsize A explained that districts may think it is less expensive to use a locally developed curriculum instead of a commercially developed curriculum; however, the superintendent stated, "By the time you pay people to come in

the summer and write, it's not.” Superintendents using locally developed curriculum agree that the cost behind locally developed curriculum is certainly there and must be calculated into the budget. The superintendent for Midsize B ISD attested that it is expensive to maintain curriculum, but there is a cost to everything. The superintendent of Large B ISD assented and stated:

You have to continually invest, so there are dollars attached to that. With budget cuts, you can't say I am going to cut aspects of the curriculum, because at the point you say that, it will become stale, out of date, and you will start suffering. You have to be committed to saying we must spend the dollars in that area. We can't cut them.

The superintendents also commented on additional costs related to commercially developed curriculum in relation to resources. The superintendent of Small A ISD described that if the commercially developed curriculum lists resources that the district does not have then there is more money involved to purchase those. If the district is not able to purchase those resources immediately, the superintendent continued to explain that if teachers do not have the resources listed within the curriculum; it can become frustrating for teachers. Small B ISD experienced having to purchase additional resources that were outlined in the commercially developed curriculum. The superintendent explained:

A challenge we found is that when you get this commercial curriculum or any commercially developed curriculum, none of that includes your materials and resources and that is a big penny to go and make sure that for the lessons that are in the curriculum, you are providing your teachers with the materials they are going to need to teach those lessons especially in Science with labs. You're familiar with FOSS kits I'm sure, so with the commercially developed curriculum we bought, you need to fill those orders, if you want teachers to use the resources outlined in the lessons.

All six superintendents talked about the cost involved in curriculum whether the district uses locally or commercially developed curriculum and discussed the current and impending issues school districts will be facing statewide due to the reduction in the educational budget. However, all six superintendents communicated that curriculum should not be an area that is targeted for budget reductions. The superintendent of Large A ISD stated, “It’s just too important, because that’s what we are really about. We are about teaching and learning.”

Research Question 3

How does the decision-making process regarding curriculum selection correlate with other functions of the superintendent and the school district? For this question, the researcher collected data using a coding framework derived from the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008). Ten functions of school districts/superintendents are outlined in the guide and were used during the interviews to gather data related to the level of importance and time the superintendents allotted to the 10 functions: (a) Governance Operations, (b) Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations, (c) Facilities Planning and Plant Services, (d) Curriculum and Instruction, (e) Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations, (f) Instructional Support Services, (g) External and Internal Communications, (h) Human Resources, (i) Safety and Security Services, and (j) Accountability, Information Management, and Technology Services. The participants were asked to rank the 10 functions as they relate to their role as superintendent. The participants ranked the functions twice: (a) by importance and (b) by time devotion. The ranking was based on a scale of 1-10, with 10

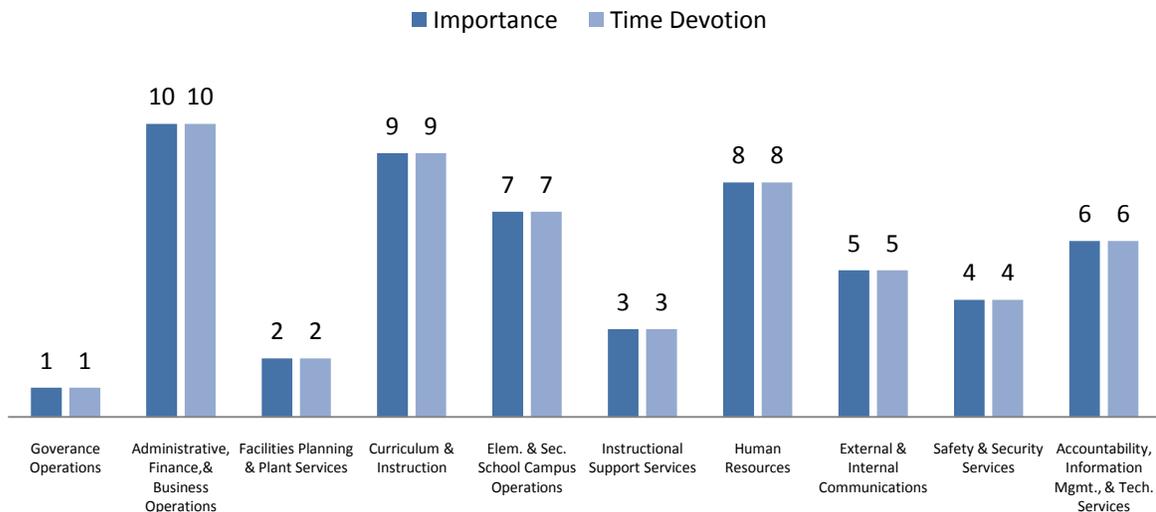
being the most important function to the superintendent and the function receiving the most time of the superintendent. The research provides a table for each of the six superintendents related to the questioning/ranking that took place during the interview pertaining to the 10 functions. In addition, the dialogue surrounding the ranking of the functions provided the data for addressing the final research question of this study.

The literature recognizes that superintendents must attend to multiple issues, problems, activities, and departments; however, the press upon superintendents to be leaders of curriculum and instruction in addition to overseers of operations is real and growing (Kowalski, 2006). The superintendent is the foremost player in providing a suitable curriculum to meet the needs of all students and produce a citizen who is successful and productive in life (Andero, 2001). Hence, the responsibility of the superintendent to focus on curriculum choice has a two-fold implication: (a) to produce successful and productive citizens and (b) to meet the demands of stringent accountability requirements (Bracy, 2003). Moreover, the success or failure of public schools requires superintendents to serve as instructional leaders and maintain a high level of involvement in curriculum choice and management (Bridges, 1982; Cuban, 1984). The data collected from the interviews with the six superintendents revealed that all six superintendents had a high level of involvement regarding curriculum choice; however, the data revealed the six superintendents have varying levels of involvement in the overseeing of curriculum due to their involvement with the other functions of the district.

Large A ISD Superintendent

In regards to importance, the superintendent of Large A ISD (Figure 1) ranked Curriculum and Instruction and specifically as it pertains to curriculum choice and the overseeing of curriculum a 9. The superintendent stated:

I placed it there (9th ranking) because I think that’s really the main thing in the school district—curriculum and instruction. In Large A ISD we have the LEARN model—that’s an acronym that stands for the four elements that we see are vitally important to school improvement: lead with curriculum; expert instructional delivery; assessments; and responding to the needs of the learner. When you have those four in place at a high level, what you see is increased student learning. That’s really what we are here for and so I think that’s absolutely critical and that’s why I put it at #9. And probably the only reason why I didn’t put it at #10 is because unless you have the administrative and finance, you can’t get curriculum and instruction.



Note. Data gathered from Appendix B: Interview Protocol Addendum based on The Ten Functions of School Districts from the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008).

Figure 1. Large A ISD Superintendent.

The superintendent continued to explain that Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations come before anything else because districts are operating with the public's money. As far as how much time the superintendent devotes to Curriculum and Instruction, again it was ranked with a 9. Large A ISD has a Chief Academic Officer, but the superintendent spends time with principals helping them understand the importance of curriculum and instruction. The focus for working with the principals in Large A ISD is centered around assisting principals and namely teachers understand the standards to the depth necessary. In addition, the focus also includes discussion about how teachers are not independent contractors. The superintendent stated, "It's hard; it's very hard. It's time consuming." However, the superintendent continued by explaining that though it is time consuming, it is a critical component for the school district. The superintendent elaborated:

I think one of the greatest challenges in this whole issue is do you really have the time to sit down and develop teachers in a way that they understand the standards. Curriculum is based on standards and so there has to be absolute clarity on: "What is it that I need to teach students? How do I get them to the level of the standard? In order to do that, I have to understand that standard extremely well.

Thus, the importance and the time spent on the function Curriculum and Instruction is reflected in the district's curriculum choice. Large A ISD uses a commercially developed curriculum primarily because the superintendent says, "It (commercially developed curriculum) takes the standard and focuses it down to a more granular level so that teachers can understand what they're really trying to teach."

Another correlation between curriculum choice and the functions outlined in the *Cooperative Superintendency Field Experience Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008), the

superintendent described involves External and Internal Communications. The superintendent explained the role of the superintendent is to be the spokesman for the district. “My role is to convey ‘What are we about? What is our mission? What do we consider most important in the school district?’” Additionally, the superintendent described the role of superintendent to include bringing all the pieces together, effectively communicating to the staff, and operating in such a way that we have increased student learning.

Large B ISD Superintendent

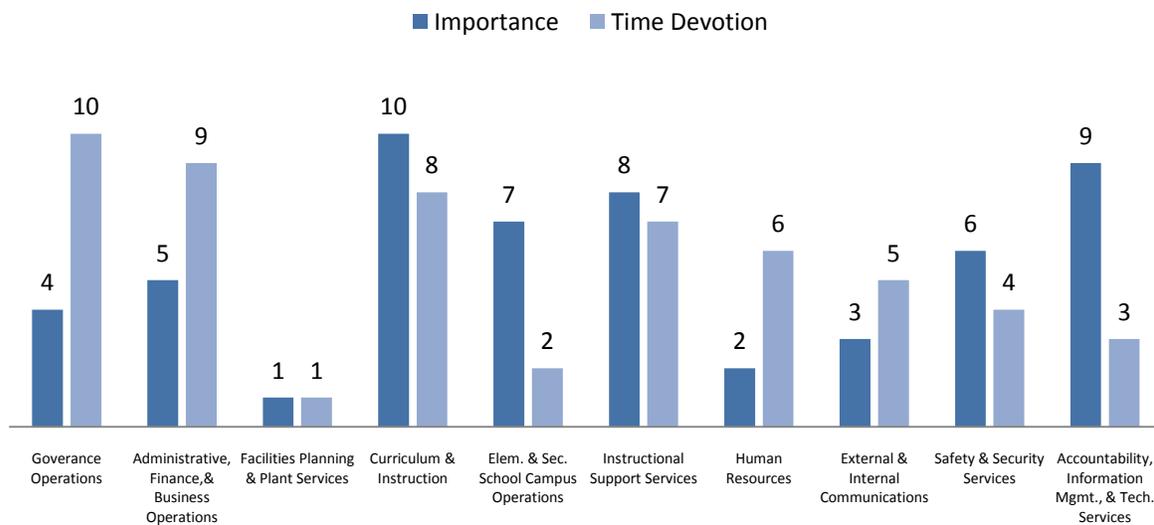
The superintendent of Large B ISD (Figure 2) ranked Curriculum and Instruction a 10 in relation to importance and an 8 in relation to time devotion. The superintendent explained:

When I think of about school improvement and the performance piece, having a good strong curriculum and the instruction that goes along with that is primary. If you do not have a strong curriculum, then you can forget all the rest. You may have the best staff, the best staff development program, a lot of financial support, but if you do not have the curriculum and instruction in place, it’s all for naught.

The superintendent explained involvement with curriculum is not the day-to-day development and/or writing of curriculum or the observing of it being taught in the classrooms; however, time is spent with the various staff members at Central Office who work with curriculum on the frontlines. Large B ISD uses a locally developed curriculum and this choice has been in place for years. The superintendent explained that the results the district yields is a key reason they continue to develop local curriculum. Though the decision-making process to continue with locally developed curriculum is in

place and is working, the superintendent explained it is not a function that can then be shifted downward. The superintendent stated:

You have to make sure that the different components for the curriculum are there and here, I am talking about continuing to develop it; continuing to keep our assessments up to date; our training and staff development up to date; and making sure all things are working well. That is an ongoing thing that you have to make sure is happening, because if any one of those slip, things do not work well.



Note. Data gathered from Appendix B: Interview Protocol Addendum based on The Ten Functions of School Districts from the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008).

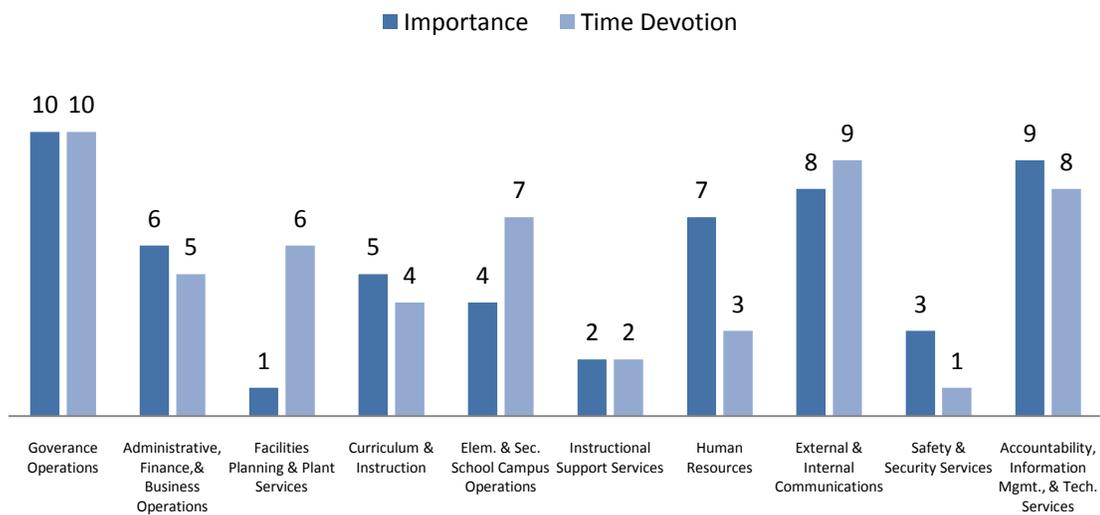
Figure 2. Large B ISD Superintendent.

Midsize A ISD Superintendent

The superintendent of Midsize A ISD (Figure 3) placed emphasis on the fact that the ranking of the 10 functions is determinate of the current state of the district and explained that some functions will always be ranked at a certain level and other functions will fluctuate, which was the case regarding Curriculum and Instruction. The

superintendent explained when arriving at Midsize A ISD, Curriculum and Instruction would have received a much higher rank because as stated, “When I came here, I needed a curriculum yesterday.” The decision-making process of selecting a commercially developed curriculum impacted some of the other functions because it was highly important to implement a curriculum and a great amount of time was spent accomplishing that. The superintendent explained:

I brought in this commercially developed curriculum. I have been a part of it from its beginning. But when I brought it in, there was a lot of push back. It took a lot of training, technology, and capital. It’s difficult for people to change. It was like surgically implanting a foreign thing into a body. It’s a change, and change is tough for some people. Now that it is in place, it is working well, and I have people in place overseeing it. So, I do not have to spend near as much time as I did in the inception stages.



Note. Data gathered from Appendix B: Interview Protocol Addendum based on The Ten Functions of School Districts from the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Guide* (Olivarez, 2008).

Figure 3. Midsize A ISD Superintendent.

Thus is the reason for the ranking of Curriculum and Instruction a 5 in regards to importance and a 4 in regards to time devotion. The superintendent elaborated on how

the other function correlated to the function of Curriculum and Instruction, namely curriculum choice:

Governance is always the most important...always, because if governance isn't working then a superintendent's time is spent on that, and there is not time for anything else. That is the oxygen in your blood right there. I ranked Accountability, Information Management, and Technology Services 9th only because of the word accountability, because we have to tell our story. The state mandates what is important. Communication shouldn't be ranked so high, but it is because without relationships you cannot get anything accomplished. I ranked HR 7th by importance because if it is all working well; it's all working well. But if it's bad, it goes bad quickly. Elementary and Secondary Campuses should be 10th but in reality it isn't because of all these other things. So it is, but it isn't. And it's not that 5 and 4 (Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations and Curriculum and Instruction) are not important because these are things that have to be in place for the other moving parts to work.

The superintendent stressed that time devotion depends on if that particular function is going well or not within the district. However, the superintendent continued by explaining that the job of the superintendent is to, "Simply ensure that the accountability is there in regards to the use of the curriculum; be supportive; and to make sure that the curriculum does not die. It is as living and breathing animal and it always needs to be watched." Additionally, the superintendent said it is essential to make sure principals and assistant principals are taking on those same responsibilities.

The decision-making process regarding curriculum choice correlated with External and Internal Communications for the superintendent of Midsize A ISD. The superintendent referenced the importance of this function in regards to building relationships and the importance of communicating to district staff and the community. Wheatley (2006) affirms an effectual superintendent cannot lead by standing outside or

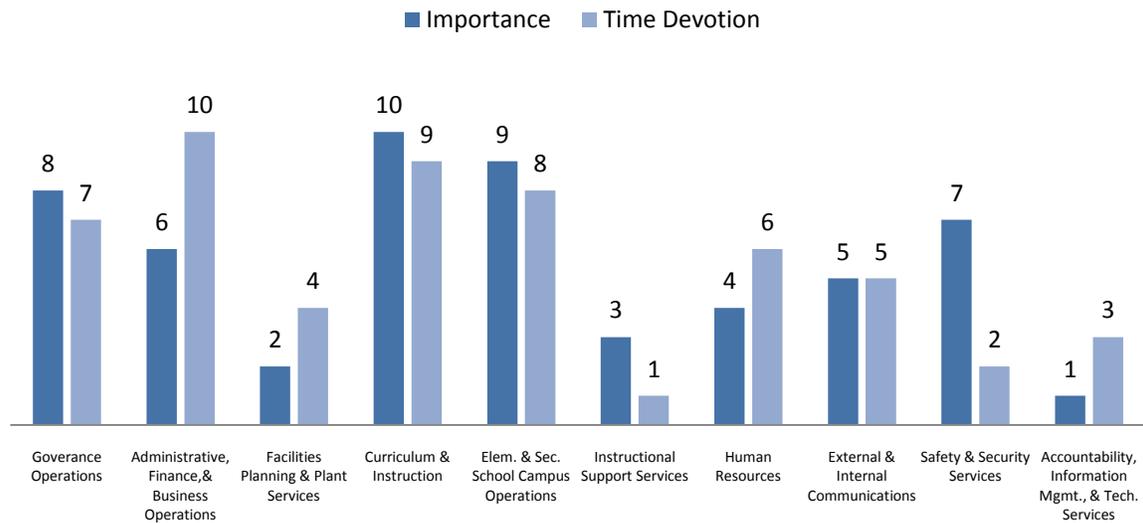
ignoring the web of relationships through which all work is executed. The superintendent of Midsize A ISD stated:

In the beginning when I brought in this commercially developed curriculum, I knew I had to build some relationships and get some lifeboats around me. The reason a curriculum will get rejected is not because it's a bad curriculum, but because you haven't gotten teachers and principals in the boat. You have to show people here's why we need to change. I went on the speaking circuit. We need to use tax dollars efficiently and effectively. I spent a lot of time informing the community making sure they knew we were about to change the curriculum and implant a new one. I knew I needed their support. So that when a teacher fussed about it to the mayor, he would say, "From my understanding you need a curriculum in place so that we see gains." You need support from the community because your teachers are part of that community.

Midsize B ISD Superintendent

The superintendent of Midsize B (Figure 4) ranked Curriculum and Instruction 10th in connection with importance and 9th in connection with time devoted to this function. Regarding importance, the superintendent explained that the function of Curriculum and Instruction and the function of Elementary and Secondary Campus Operations were very closely related. The superintendent continued to expand:

My primary focus is to make sure elementary and secondary campuses know about curriculum and instruction. We can talk about it and know it here at Central Office, but it means nothing if it's not out on campuses. Next would be Governance. If this is messed up everything is as well. Safety and Security could easily be number 10, so I will put it in my top half. Finance next, everything flows out of finance. If you love it, you make sure you can fund it. Accountability, Technology...these are all tools that seem to get us somewhere—a means to an end. As far as time, I spend mine largely, the bulk of my time, a huge amount of time meeting with my direct reports focused largely on finance in particular, largely tied to what that looks like on campuses.



Note. Data gathered from Appendix B: Interview Protocol Addendum based on The Ten Functions of School Districts from the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008).

Figure 4. Midsize B ISD Superintendent.

The superintendent further explained that the decision-making process surrounding curriculum and curriculum choice does in fact impact and correlate with the other functions of a school district and superintendent. Midsize B ISD linked curriculum and instruction into their Facilities Planning (and Plant Services) by designing campuses based on effective instruction. This ultimately correlates with Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations as well. The superintendent stated that is how the district exists as an organization; all the functions networked together. The superintendent described this networking of functions:

I linked the elementary and secondary campuses with curriculum and instruction because that is where the rubber meets the road. It's not us having our own curriculum, but how do we operationalize that down to the campus/teacher level and then to the student level so that it flows naturally? It can't be just about great curriculum, because at the end of the day it has to be about students learning, not

just about passing a test, but them exiting the system with the same passion for learning as they had when they entered the system.

Midsized B ISD uses a locally developed curriculum and the superintendent explained the decision-making process to use a locally developed curriculum strongly correlates with the function of Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations. Though the superintendent does not personally write the curriculum, test the curriculum, or teach the curriculum, the superintendent interacts with the curriculum department to ensure that the district is approaching curriculum in a way that will best meet the needs of the students. The superintendent said, "I make sure I place financial resources/money into the areas of curriculum that we need in order to move forward."

The superintendent of Midsized B ISD also described a correlation between curriculum choice and External and Internal Communications and Governance Operations by stating:

I must keep the board thoroughly informed, be brutally honest when I need to, be a liaison between what is going on in the classrooms. I want the board to understand what is going on, but not get overly involved. If they do, that's a problem resulting in me not communicating with them enough.

In reflecting on the 10 functions of school districts and superintendents, the superintendent of Midsized B ISD said that the greatest challenge related to curriculum and curriculum choice for superintendents is "keeping the main thing the main thing." The superintendent continued by explaining that it is fundamental to remember that the main thing is student learning.

Small A ISD Superintendent

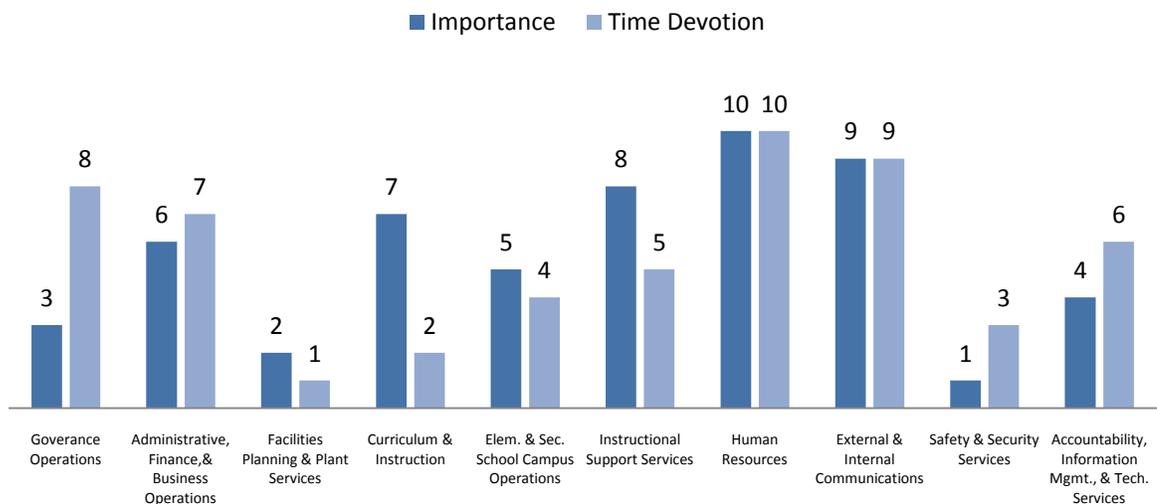
The superintendent of Small A ISD (Figure 5) described Human Resources as being the most important function of any school district and the function in which the most time is devoted. Firestone (2009) states personnel is one of the areas superintendents work in to build support for student learning and will clearly recruit administrators supportive of their vision. “From a human resource perspective, the key is to tailor organizations to individuals; to find a way to get the job done while feeling good about what they are doing” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 14). The Small A ISD superintendent stated, “This organization is driven by the people,” and explained there is a very strong correlation between curriculum choice and the function of Human Resources based on the crucial responsibility of hiring the right people to ensure the curriculum piece is operating at different levels and contains all the essential pieces required for teachers and students to be successful. The superintendent continued:

I get myself involved in the hiring even of teachers at times, because it is that important—leadership development. Recruit, move up, move and switch; I spend an enormous amount of time thinking about where people sit and fit in—their talent, their personality, mental capacity, developing those things. I think as superintendent, it’s about finding the right people with the right talent, developing them consistently so they can tag-along with us.

External and Internal Communications and Instructional Support Systems were both functions the superintendent described as being significant gears in connection with the curriculum operating successfully. Five years ago as the Deputy Superintendent, overseeing Curriculum and Instruction, Small A ISD essentially did not have a curriculum or even a curriculum department. This is where the communication function became extremely important; the superintendent explained how important it was to

communicate the critical needs of the district. The district did not have the funding for department personnel solely dedicated to curriculum; however, through an extensive grant, curriculum positions were fleshed out. The superintendent explained certain contents were critical areas that had to be addressed first. The district has evolved since then. The superintendent expressed the importance of developing leadership at all levels, not just within Central Office, but on campuses with principals and teachers, and even among instructional support again compelling the need to communicate with key personnel throughout the district. The superintendent stated:

C & I belongs to all those folks. It has to be rooted down in everyone involved with student achievement. Central Office can create these great documents, but we have to make sure there is connection with campuses so that they will own it; execute it as much as possible.



Note. Data gathered from Appendix B: Interview Protocol Addendum based on The Ten Functions of School Districts from the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008).

Figure 5. Small A ISD Superintendent.

The superintendent expressed there is a desire to spend more time with curriculum, but unfortunately the other functions constantly present themselves and occupy time.

“Having someone in place to handle C & I is important to me,” the superintendent concluded.

Small B ISD Superintendent

The superintendent of Small B ISD (Figure 6) immediately explained that as superintendents the function of Curriculum and Instruction should be priority in relation to importance even though it was ranked 6th. The superintendent said:

I should have probably placed it even higher, but the reality is that your time is taken from focusing on the C & I because you are dealing with the other areas. The ones I put ahead of C & I were more a priority in Small B ISD. So I think that it varies depending on the district and the current state of where that district is. The first year, Curriculum and Instruction was definitely very important because there was not a curriculum in place.

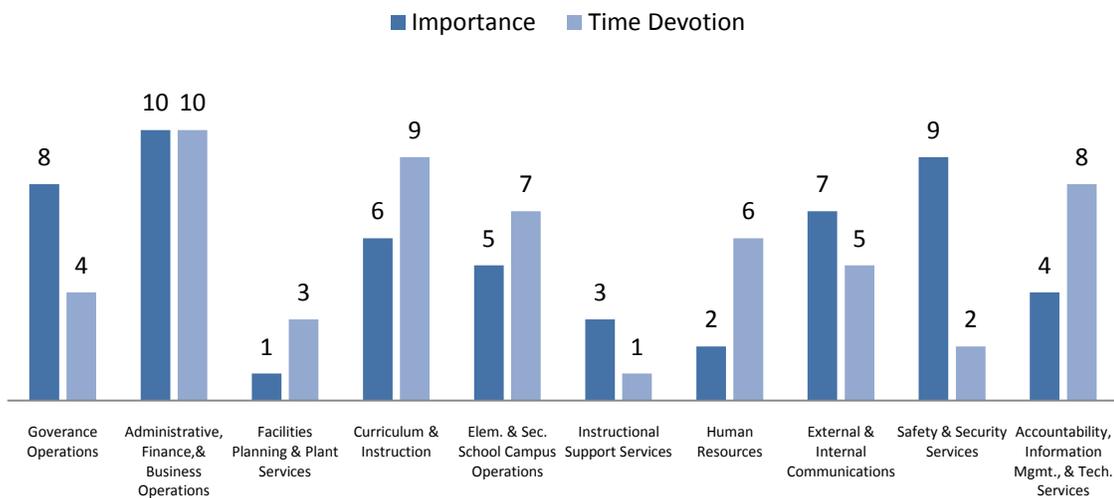
The superintendent ranked Curriculum and Instruction a 9 concerning time devotion and explained:

Many superintendents turn it over to their Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction and really kind of remove themselves. My personal opinion is that because that is our main priority—instruction to the kids—that is the one area that we should be involved in the most even if it is as much as meeting regularly with the people who are doing the day-to-day curriculum work. And a superintendent being involved in curriculum is important regardless of the size of the district.

The superintendent of Small B ISD described that deciding to implement a commercially developed curriculum affected other functions of the district. The function that correlated the most was Accountability, Information Management, and Technology Services, with Accountability being the focal point. The superintendent explained the district was suffering academically due to a failing curriculum and implementing a

commercially developed curriculum was the answer. Paying constant attention to the academic results across the district in light of the state’s accountability system is an unending challenge the superintendent explained. The superintendent also described the necessity to hold district staff accountable:

It goes back to your principals and teachers and making sure you hold your principals accountable that their teachers are following it. We want to make sure our kids were picking it up and being successful so we had to make sure our teachers were following the curriculum.



Note. Data gathered from Appendix B: Interview Protocol Addendum based on The Ten Functions of School Districts from the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008).

Figure 6. Small B ISD Superintendent.

Though Small B ISD uses a commercially developed curriculum, the superintendent explained in essence they have a hybrid curriculum. This is where a component of Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations correlates with the

decision-making choice to use a commercially developed curriculum, but scaffolded with locally developed pieces. The superintendent explained:

We knew many may not be receptive to bringing in curriculum from the outside. We allowed our teachers—“You will use this curriculum, but you get to go ‘plug-in’ what you feel we need to add.” So when teachers come together with Central Office folks, they looked at it, they said, “We need to plug this in here; we need to change this from one day to two days.” We had the minimum which was the commercially developed curriculum, but then we tried to do above and beyond like adding in district-created lessons and gold standard lessons. We communicated that it is okay to deviate to the extent that if you feel that the commercial product is not enough and you want to do more, that’s fine. That’s why we provided additional resources and supplements. It came together and they (teachers) were feeling ownership.

The superintendent emphasized that if the district has certain functions under control like policy and governance, strong finances and a good fund balance in place, more time can be spent on the function of Curriculum and Instruction.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The modern-day superintendency faces escalating challenges in light of unparalleled challenges affecting school district leadership. School district size, rate of growth, and altering demographics contribute to the complex environment in addition to the increasing obstacles associated with providing a robust curriculum, achieving high levels of student performance, and successfully meeting rigorous accountability standards. These intense challenges have created a system in which the contemporary superintendent must take action and allocate sufficient time to all the varying functions of the school district.

With student performance at the axis of funding, accountability ratings, and federal and state initiatives, providing a curriculum to meet the needs of all students is a critical function of today's school district superintendent (Andero, 2001). Today's superintendent must face current and pressing challenges with a clear instructional vision, keeping the development of curriculum at the heart of leadership initiatives (Black, 2007). Consequently, the state of Texas places much emphasis on curriculum by providing the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for districts and each year revise, add to, and delete content standards in order to maintain refinement and alignment. This in turn positions school districts to implement the revised standards and modify curriculum accordingly, which then transfers into the district spending an extensive amount of time, resources, personnel, and funding. Superintendents must then take into account several encompassing considerations in making curricular choices.

These considerations present an ongoing and unfolding challenge for the modern superintendent.

The purpose of this study was to determine the contiguous factors and their respective variables that influence and guide the superintendent's decision-making process in selecting a curriculum. Contemplating the multiple of compounded functions that define the operational nature of school systems, this study investigated how the curriculum decision-making process impacts the other leadership and managerial functions of the modern superintendent.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What factors does the superintendent consider in selecting a curriculum?
2. How do these factors impact the decision to use a commercially developed curriculum or to use a locally developed curriculum?
3. How does the decision-making process regarding curriculum selection correlate with other functions of the superintendent and the school district?

A qualitative methodology was used in this study to investigate the factors a superintendent considers when selecting a curriculum. The unit of analysis was the superintendent of a Texas public school district and connects with working with small samples of subjects within their context and studied comprehensively (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A multiple case study approach was used for this study since multiple cases provide an extensive understanding of processes and outcomes (Miles & Huberman, 1994); thus, six superintendents were selected for this study. Through the

study of individuals in specific settings, information can be gathered that can be applied in similar situations (Trochim, 2000).

For this study, qualitative data were collected by a single researcher, and the principal data sources were semi-structured interviews with superintendents from preselected districts based on current curriculum choice and district size, as well as document review. In addition, the 10 functions of school districts/superintendents as delineated in the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008) served as a coding framework when analyzing the data collected from the interviews. Triangulation of results from all three data sources informed the findings and final conclusions (Mertens, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Discussion of Findings

The first research question asked what factors superintendents consider when selecting a curriculum. The analysis of the data collected disclosed there were several factors superintendents considered when contemplating curriculum choice and that the superintendents shared many of the same factors regarding curriculum choice. The emerging factors were: (a) current state and context of the district; (b) academic gaps and curriculum alignment; and (c) time, personnel, and finances.

The superintendents from Small A ISD and Small B ISD both described the impact the context of the district along with the current state of the district has on curriculum choice. The superintendent of Small B ISD stated that the fact that at the onset, the district fundamentally did not have curriculum and as a result was plummeting in regards to accountability standards, as well as experiencing significant financial

problems, these factors exceedingly impacted curriculum choice. The superintendent of Small A ISD explained that the demographic variable and the teacher variable were and continue to be exacting factors when considering curriculum choice. The superintendent stated that with over 480 teachers in Small A ISD, 66% have 0-5 years experience; thus, that is contextual data that a superintendent must contemplate.

All six superintendents referenced the requisite of having a guaranteed and viable curriculum in order to close academic gaps. Furthermore, all six superintendents explained that ensuring the district does have a guaranteed and viable curriculum commands having adequate time, personnel, and financial support.

The second research question asked how the factors that emerged from question 1 impact the decision to use a commercially developed curriculum or to use a locally developed curriculum. The six superintendents interviewed for this study each played a role in the decision-making process, whether the choice was to continue using locally developed curriculum or the choice to purchase a commercially developed curriculum. The factors that emerged impacted the decision three of the superintendents made to use locally developed curriculum, and the same factors impacted the decision three superintendents made to use commercially developed curriculum.

The third research question asked how the decision-making process regarding curriculum selection correlates with other functions of the superintendent and the school district. The 10 functions of school districts and the superintendent, respectively, as outlined in the Cooperative *Superintendency Program Field Experience Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008) served as coding framework that allowed the researcher to analyze data

regarding correlations between the function of Curriculum and Instruction, namely curriculum choice, with the remaining nine functions of the district/ superintendent. The data disclosed that the superintendents varied in their ranking of the 10 functions both by importance and by time devotion. The superintendents also explained that though some factors would always remain top priority, other functions fluctuate in both importance and time devotion due to the current state of the district. The following conveys findings that transpired from the three research questions.

Finding 1

Overseeing and maintaining a guaranteed and viable curriculum is very time and cost intensive, but the essential piece for student achievement. Whether the district uses a commercially developed curriculum or a locally developed curriculum, all six superintendents discussed how time and cost were critical elements in regards to maintaining an effective curriculum. One superintendent (Large A ISD) described the curriculum as requiring constant transformation and modification, which in turn, converts into a relentless maintenance effort, which then translates into time and money. Wills and Peterson (1995) describe that district leaders operate in an environment that is turbulent, complex, and thus subject to considerable uncertainty. Ever-changing state standards and accountability measures then incur an ever-changing curriculum. “We’re a continuous improvement district. We are continually working on improving the curriculum,” stated the superintendent of Midsize B ISD.

Despite the curriculum choice, commercially or locally developed, all six superintendents in this study described the various aspects associated with time and cost.

Commercially developed curriculum certainly has a procured cost and the product that was referenced in this study; the superintendents commented it was expensive and payment for the curriculum has to be made each year. Superintendents using locally developed curriculum did not disregard cost, because funding has to be in place to cover initial curriculum personnel as well as additional personnel to assist with building, revising, and editing curriculum. For example, after a document review of Small A ISD, cost was incurred for a Curriculum Collaborative that was composed of teachers that assisted the curriculum department in revising curriculum due to the newly revised Science TEKS.

Sustainability is an invariable priority relating to curriculum. The superintendent of Midsize B ISD said when time is not spent maintaining and sustaining curriculum, it will become stagnant; thus, time appropriated to having a guaranteed and viable curriculum is compulsory for any district aspiring to gain any level of academic success (Downey, 2003). The superintendent of Large B ISD explained that time and cost are directly linked. The superintendent stated, “You have to continually invest in curriculum; invest time, and there are dollars attached to that.” Owings and Kaplan (2003) attest that the heightened emphasis on school accountability hands district leaders the responsibility of student achievement, which requires preparation, resources, and time. Great leaders must decide what to do, and then they must seek the necessary resources to get things done (Owings & Kaplan, 2003). Three superintendents in this study specifically addressed the massive budget constraints effecting districts across the state of Texas; however, with such importance attached to curriculum, superintendents must be

committed to allocating the necessary finances to ensure they have a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

Finding 2

The superintendents in this study were adamant advocates for their curriculum choice and had justifiable reasons for their choice. When deciding between a commercially or locally developed curriculum, the data collected for this study revealed that one curriculum did not ascend over the other curriculum. The superintendents in this study, three using locally developed curriculum and three using commercially developed curriculum, undauntedly substantiated their curriculum choice. Each superintendent confidently delineated and elaborated on factors that impacted their decision-making process. No longer does the community view the superintendent as the expert on schools solely because he or she carries the title of superintendent, rather he or she is often the target of criticism and forced to become the defender of the decisions they make regarding district decisions (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996). Each superintendent interviewed for this study purposefully defended their decision-making process regarding curriculum choice. The research for this study did reveal, however, that one superintendent (Small B ISD) spoke extensively about the value in having a hybrid curriculum. The superintendent explained that having a commercially developed curriculum as the foundation is critical, but it is imperative for the district to supplement with additional components to meet the needs of the students in their particular district, as well as garner the extra support and buy-in from district staff, specifically teachers. This

punctuated what the other five superintendents identified as being a positive for locally developed curriculum, that being teacher buy-in.

Stakeholders look to the superintendent to establish and execute a progressive focus for the district and constantly communicate that focus; thus, the superintendents must earnestly believe in the decisions they make that contribute to that focus. The superintendent of Small A ISD, stated emphatically, “I do believe in locally developed curriculum.” Moreover, the superintendent of Midsize A ISD said, “I am biased; commercially developed curriculum was the curriculum I wanted.” Nevertheless, both superintendents resolutely verbalized the reasons behind their curriculum choice and communicated those reasons to all stakeholders.

Finding 3

With the role of the superintendent being very taxing, the function of Curriculum and Instruction does not always take priority. For school districts to progress forward interrelating to student achievement, superintendents are expected to provide the best possible curriculum to children: a curriculum that prepares each student for the future and maximize the potential of each (Andero, 2001). The superintendents interviewed for this study recognized their responsibility to be the primary instructional leader in the district and be able to develop a district-wide vision, one that includes an effective curriculum, in order to achieve success at all levels of the organization, notably at the student level. The superintendent of Midsize A ISD said:

It’s something how the importance of curriculum has changed and has become political. Years ago you wouldn’t hear of superintendents getting fired over test scores; “You better take care of the money.” But now, superintendents get fired over things related to curriculum and test scores.

Ivory and Acker-Hocevar (2007) state leadership within public schools has taken on a new stratum, and school boards across the country are not hesitating to terminate a superintendent’s contract if the lofty expectations are not being met.

Table 2 outlines where each of the six superintendents ranked the function of Curriculum and Instruction (Olivarez, 2008) regarding importance and how much time they devote to the function. Ten (10) is the highest ranking a superintendent could give a function.

Table 2

Function: Curriculum and Instruction

District	Importance	Time Devotion
Small A ISD	7	2
Small B ISD	6	9
Midsize A ISD	5	4
Midsize B ISD	10	9
Large A ISD	9	9
Large B ISD	10	8

Note. Data gathered from Appendix B: Interview Protocol Addendum based on The Ten Functions of School Districts from the *Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008).

Though the literature and even the superintendent’s expressions during the interviews reveal curriculum is very important and accordingly requires time, the data revealed some superintendents did not see the function of Curriculum and Instruction to be very important. The ranking of 10 – 1, can be divided into five categories: (a) very significant importance (10, 9); (b) significant importance (8, 7); (c) moderate importance (6, 5); (d) insignificant importance (4, 3); and (e) very insignificant importance (2, 1). Thus, three of the six superintendents can be categorized as considering the function of Curriculum and Instruction to have very significant importance. One superintendent is

categorized as considering the function of Curriculum and Instruction as having significant importance. One superintendent is categorized as considering the function of Curriculum and Instruction as being moderately important. In light of the inevitable fact that curriculum serves as the foundational component of student performance and since student performance is what schools are judged by and how school boards and the public essentially determine the effectiveness of the superintendent (Black, 2007; Glass, 2007), the data disclosed were assuring, since no superintendents were categorized as considering the function of Curriculum and Instruction as having insignificant importance or very insignificant importance.

The six superintendents recognized that curriculum is foundational for student and conclusively district success; however, for the majority of the six superintendents, the other functions of the district command much of their time. Houston (2007) asserts superintendents must be masters of communication, collaboration, community building, child advocacy, curricular solutions as well as buildings, buses, books, budgets, and bonds. The superintendents of the study ranked the 10 functions of a school district/ superintendent and the data revealed was variant among the six superintendents. Using five categories again in analyzing the data from Table 2, in regards to time devotion the categories are: (a) a very significant amount of time (10, 9); (b) a significant amount of time (8, 7); (c) a moderate amount of time (6, 5); (d) an insignificant amount of time (4, 3); and (e) a very insignificant amount of time (2, 1). Three superintendents were categorized as spending a very significant amount of time with Curriculum and Instruction; one superintendent spends a significant amount of time with Curriculum and

Instruction; one superintendent spends an insignificant amount of time with Curriculum and Instruction; and one superintendent spends a very insignificant amount of time with Curriculum and Instruction. In further examination concerning any correlations between the amount of time spent with the function of Curriculum and Instruction and the district's choice to use locally or commercially developed curriculum disclosed there was not a pattern regarding either curriculum choice. For example, the superintendent who spends a very insignificant amount of time (ranking of a 2) with Curriculum and Instruction uses a locally developed curriculum and yet another superintendent who uses a locally developed curriculum spends a very significant amount of time (ranking of a 9) with Curriculum and Instruction. Likewise, a superintendent who uses a commercially developed curriculum spends an insignificant amount of time (ranking of 4) with this function, and another superintendent who uses a commercially developed curriculum spends a very significant amount of time (ranking of 9) with the function of Curriculum and Instruction. This analysis outlines that the amount of time a superintendent devotes to the function of Curriculum and Instruction does not correlate with their curriculum choice or their conception that curriculum is important, but it is determined by the time they devote to the other functions within the district.

Implications

The modern day superintendent faces many challenges in today's environment of revolving and rigorous student expectations along with the formidable climate of accountability. This study sought to examine the factors superintendents consider when deciding between a commercially developed curriculum and a locally developed

curriculum. There are two implications associated with this study: one is associated with accountability and the second implication pertains to a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

First, a school district and its respective superintendent's success are measured by a student performance accountability system. This is an exacting element of today's educational system and one superintendents cannot disregard, but on the contrary must envelop and comprehend. How superintendents interpret and act on accountability matters can determine if a school district is high achieving or not. The rise of the accountability movement, as exemplified by No Child Left Behind, commands superintendents to generate an accountability culture in school districts, a culture that creates coherence and a centralized focus on teaching and learning. The superintendent needs to be the predominant person in producing concrete visions for improving student achievement and communicating those visions to the level that all district staff internalize them as their own visions for improvement and hold themselves accountable (Firestone, 2009).

Second, due to increasing state testing and federal requirements for student performance as well as the state curriculum undergoing a continual revision process, school districts have been forced to ensure teachers and students have a thorough and explicit understanding of what needs to be taught and learned. This can only occur through a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Marzano (2003) explains that for the most part, the premise of a guaranteed and viable curriculum lies in a combination of opportunity to learn and time. If students do not have the opportunity to learn the content that is expected of them, the chance they will learn the content is very minimal (Marzano,

2003). Being a guaranteed curriculum means that states and districts give explicit guidance to teachers regarding the content to be addressed in specific courses and at specific grade levels (Marzano, 2003). In addition, Marzano (2003) states teachers must not have the option to disregard or replace assigned content if the curriculum is justly guaranteed and viable. Despite layers of organizational personnel, be it an Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, a Chief Academic Office, or a Director of Curriculum and Instruction, the superintendent must make certain that a guaranteed and viable curriculum is being used and communicate a vision regarding the rationale of using this curriculum. Togneri and Anderson (2003) assert that many districts select commercial curriculum, but at the same time, many districts develop their own with substantial teacher input. Whether commercially developed or locally developed, these curricula become a way for district leadership to operationalize the district vision and coordinate teaching across the classrooms (Firestone, 2009).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined the factors superintendents consider when deciding between a commercially developed curriculum or a locally developed curriculum. While this study generated extensive data regarding this decision-making process, there are additional opportunities for future research. Factors impacting curriculum choice were examined; however, future studies examining the correlations between curriculum choice and student performance would provide superintendents with further data that could potentially impact overall district performance. The superintendents using commercially developed curriculum and locally developed curriculum both discussed success with their

respective curriculums. Though performance data were not gathered or analyzed for this study, this would serve as basis for future research in conjunction with curriculum choice.

Several of the superintendents interviewed for this study commented on the critical requisition of implementation, whether the district uses a commercially or locally developed curriculum; this could be the concentration of future research. The superintendent of Midsize A ISD said that implementation is the greatest challenge connected to curriculum. “Whether something is working or not, it all comes down to implementation,” stated the superintendent of Small B ISD. The successful implementation of any curriculum involves thoughtful planning and hard work on many levels, and experience from the field suggests an implementation plan and a professional development plan are critical in successfully implementing a curriculum that will improve teaching and learning (Hale, 2008). Fullan (2004) explains effective leadership is expected to be responsible for confronting change by taking on the task of orchestrating and supporting the learning of others to accomplish new initiatives and goals by specifically implementing ongoing professional development and promoting lateral capacity building. Future research could examine the determining factors of successful curriculum implementation and if there are more demanding factors related to implementing either locally developed or commercially developed curriculum.

This multi-case study focused on superintendents of school districts in the state of Texas. In addition, the superintendents using commercially developed curriculum all use the same product, which is created in Texas. Future research could extend beyond Texas

to examine superintendents in other states and their decision-making process concerning commercially and locally developed curriculum.

Conclusion

Curriculum and instruction have always been critical to the success of public education (Marzano, 2003). Due to the spotlight on low student achievement over the years, varied reform efforts have ensued, and the efforts to raise student achievement through an increasingly rigorous curriculum is now a common goal across school districts and has become a major responsibility of the school superintendent. School boards are searching for leaders who can make decisions that are in students' best interests and that will improve academic achievement (Black, 2007). Decisions made by the superintendent regarding curriculum choice directly impact the success a student will have academically (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988).

The modern day superintendent is faced with insurmountable responsibilities and must be able to adjust to the constant pressures and problems facing education today. From proficient politicians to visionaries, superintendents are asked to allay the confusion of the current and pressing issues, while focusing on a future vision of success for all (Brown et al., 2007). Among many duties, the superintendent must attain to the facets of the 10 functions of a school district as described in *the Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Guidebook* (Olivarez, 2008) which include: Governance Operations; Administrative, Finance and Business Operations; Facilities Planning and Plant Services; Curriculum and Instruction; Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations, Instructional Support Services; External and Internal Communications; Human Resource;

Safety and Security Services; and Accountability, Information Management, and Technology Services. With overseeing the functions of the district that enable a district to operate effectively and efficiently, the function of Curriculum and Instruction may not always be chief priority of the superintendent; however, the chief priority is to provide the best education possible for the children; thus, curriculum must be at the forefront.

With such emphasis placed on having a guaranteed and viable curriculum, superintendents must put forth a concentrated effort to select a curriculum that will promote and support student learning and success. This study examined the factors superintendents considered as they navigated through the critical decision-making process to use commercially developed curriculum or a locally developed curriculum. The study also examined how a superintendent manages the encompassing functions of the district, specifically curriculum and instruction. The future of education is a fusion of peril and possibility (Houston, 2007) and the challenge for American education ultimately resides in teaching and learning, both of which find their roots in curriculum. Therefore, superintendents must operate as the primary instructional leader and serve as the core of student achievement by bringing together the vision, the people, the resources, and the actions that will positively influence how and what students learn.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol – Public School District

1. How long have you been superintendent of this district?
2. Rank the following functions of a school district as it relates to your role as superintendent and talk through why you are placing each. (see Appendix B)
 - a. Why did you place the item Curriculum and Instruction where you did for #1 as it is explained on the Interview Protocol Addendum?
 - b. Why did you place the item Curriculum and Instruction where you did for #2 as it is explained on the Interview Protocol Addendum?
3. How do you interact with curriculum in your job?
4. Please describe your Curriculum and/or Instruction Department as it relates to personnel. (Request organizational chart.)
5. Does your district use a locally developed curriculum or a commercially developed curriculum?
6. What components are included in your curriculum?
7. What role did you play in deciding between a locally developed or commercially developed curriculum?
8. What factors did you consider when selecting a curriculum?
9. In regards to a locally developed curriculum—
 - a. What would you consider to be pros?
 - b. What would you consider to be cons?
10. In regards to a commercially developed curriculum—
 - a. What would you consider to be pros?
 - b. What would you consider to be cons?
11. What are the greatest challenges related to curriculum?
12. What are the greatest challenges related to curriculum as it relates to the role of the superintendent?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol Addendum

For question #2 regarding the role of the superintendent and how it relates to curriculum, the respondents (superintendents) will rank the following functions twice:

1. By importance (10 being the most important function to the superintendent)
2. By time devotion (10 being the function receiving the most time of the superintendent)

Combining Administrative, Instructional and Political Leadership Theory with Real World Applications: The Ten Functions of School Districts

FUNCTION	1. By importance	2. By time devotion
Governance Operations		
Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations		
Facilities Planning and Plant Services		
Curriculum and Instruction		
Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations		
Instructional Support Services		
External and Internal Communications		
Human Resources		
Safety and Security Services		
Accountability, Information Management, and Technology Services		

Note. Adapted from the Cooperative Superintendency Program Field Experience Guide.

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